

Autobiography of an Italian
Detective

1856

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a trifling present for Francesca, and they went together to High Mass. She scarcely noticed me.

Madame Mandolo attended the funeral, and a day or two afterwards proposed that my sister should permanently reside with her. This was my secret wish. I had long been weary of the dull life of a fisher in an obscure rustic locality, and longed to see the world more at large. Giacomo Marini, a companion of about my own age, and following the same vocation, was as eager as myself to try our fortunes at Turin, neither of us having the slightest notion of how, or by what mode, those fortunes could be pursued. There would have been an insurmountable obstacle to my leaving Savona and my sister Francesca. But if her aunt took charge of her that obstacle would be removed. Yes, to a certain extent; but would my sister's safety be assured under the guardianship of a feeble timid woman? That was the point to be considered. I did fully consider it; decided upon what ought to be done, and consented that Francesca should at once take up her abode with Madame Mandole.

Count Festini, one of the highest of the Turin aristocracy, possessed large property in the neighbourhood of Savona, and was accustomed in the summer to take up his abode for two or three months at the Castello Nuovo, built upon a lofty spur of the Maritime Alps, from which there was a wide-sweeping glorious view of the Gulf. He had one

son, Victor Festini, a singularly handsome young fellow, courteous in demeanour, and reported to be an unscrupulous, dastardly villain, with respect to youth and beauty, when possessed by one of the humbler, defenceless class. I knew that he had cast his eyes upon Francesca, and doubted not that he meditated her ruin. I feared, too, and rightly, that my sister felt flattered, and even honoured by his attentions.

I knew where to meet with Victor Festini at a given hour, and when he would be alone. I had also my own reasons for believing him to be, though a haughty Italian noble, an arrant coward. I met the handsome young aristocrat—his age might be about four-and-twenty—and peremptorily demanded parley with him. Though seven years younger than he, I was by physical constitution and acquired hardihood much the more powerful man. He knew that well, and also that when my passions were excited I was determined, unrestrainable.

‘Well, Giuseppe Ristori,’ said he with a supercilious sneer, ‘what is this important message you *must* deliver to me?’

‘The message is simple, and direct as it is important. You have sought meetings, have had meetings, with my sister Francesca. Persons of your class *can* have no good motive in seeking the company of beautiful girls in a humble sphere of life. Now, that which I have to impress upon

you, signor, is that Francesca Ristori has a brother.'

Victor Festini laughed affectedly. I proceeded:

'A brother who will as certainly avènge any wrong done to her as that he and you now live. Listen, signor, attentively to what I say,' I added, 'for your own sake. I am about to leave this part of the country. My sister remains. Now should any harm befall her, I will kill *you*.'

'Kill *me*!'

'Kill you! yes, if my sister on her knees implored me to spare you. More than that—and these are my last words—it would be quite useless to attempt saddling another person with the crime, as you did in the Mario case not long since. If any harm befall Francesca, I will kill *you*! You would not escape me, Victor Festini. Lay this warning to heart, and be wise. Your fate is in your own hands. Adieu.'

A few days afterwards Giacomo Marini and I left for Turin. We arrived safely there, and after many weeks, and when our common funds were reduced to a few lire, accepted very humble situations. Marini got to be errand messenger in the 'Diligence' offices of the Brothers Bonaforis, in the Strada de Angennes; I was engaged at the Hôtel de l'Europe, in the Piazza del Castello—then, and I believe still, under the governance of Trombetti—as a sort of under-waiter. I did

not often see Marini, but we remained firm friends.

It happened that I and my father had saved, amongst others, from the wreck of the *Reiné Amélie*, a French merchant brig, one Monsieur Duval. He was a gentleman of means and leisure, who, partly for the complete recovery of his health—he had been as nearly drowned as it was possible to be—and partly that he admired the land and sea scenery, sojourned upwards of a year in the vicinage of Savona. Finding, as he was polite enough to say, that I should prove an apt scholar, he gave me daily lessons in French, and thus it was that when I reached Turin, where that language is commonly spoken by the better classes, I was enabled to discharge duties which, without a sufficient knowledge of the French tongue, it would have been impossible to fulfil.

This was especially the case as regards the Tavola Rotonda (*table d'hôte*), where the conversation was entirely, or almost entirely, French. Now in those days—less than two years before the immense upheaval of the nations in 1848—the very air seemed to pulsate with rumours of mighty changes about to take place in the life of nations, rumours of plots and conspiracies were rife in all quarters. Men conversed in whispers whenever they believed or imagined themselves to be in company with any one who understood the language in which they spoke. In Turin we had

Austrian spies, Roman spies, French spies, Russian spies,—secret agents of every princelet or dukelet in Italy; the object being to feel the pulse of public opinion, to unravel the schemes of political agitators who were supposed to have made Turin their head-quarters.

I cared little or nothing for politics. I was concerned only for my personal advancement in the world. Still I was a true Piedmontese, a loyal subject of the house of Savoy. Having had, as I suppose, the organ of secretiveness very largely developed, I had not boasted of my knowledge of French. It was, after all, but an *understanding* knowledge. I could interpret the language, whether it was printed or spoken, into Piedmontese Italian; but speak it with any tolerable fluency or correctness, I could not. Probably this was the chief reason that I did not boast of my acquaintance with the Gallic tongue. My appearance, manner, and speech were those of an uncultivated rustic; very civil and willing to oblige, but as ignorant of any other medium of discourse than the Piedmontese *patois* as I was of Court ceremonies. I had thus many opportunities of overhearing conversations, or rather disjointed fragmentary conversations—which, if I thought them to be of sufficient importance, I wrote out, and dropped into the post-office in the Palazzo Carignano, addressed to the Secretariat of the Ministry, and simply subscribed, 'Savoy.'

Those hints were, I knew by various indices, frequently acted upon.

One topic, however, which I several times heard furtively alluded to by two individuals, Ricci and Guardini, when they were alone together, and I was apparently thinking only of my waiterial duties, clearing away glasses, &c., I never mentioned. It related to Victor, son of Count Festini. From what I could indistinctly make out, he had, about a twelve-month previously, been affiliated to one of the many secret societies which were bent upon revolutionising Italy, and much seemed to be expected of him as 'a man of action.' They did not know him so well as I did. His historic name would, however, in the event of a popular convulsion, have a certain influence with the masses. Now I personally felt no antipathy toward the 'party of action.' The prince-vassals of Austria neither commanded my respect nor my admiration; but I was shrewd enough to be aware that the time of the 'Unita Italia' party was not come. If I could therefore obtain proof that the son of an Italian noble was a sworn member of an illegal society, I should hold his fate in my hands. That would be a better security for Francesca than my stiletto threat. Besides that, the fulfilment of that threat—and I certainly, had the contingency occurred, should have fulfilled it in those hot youthful days of mine—would have involved the forfeiture of my own life, which I had

begun to value much more highly than I had done, in the hope that it would, when but a year or two had passed, be shared by another. This I mention *en passant*.

My inquiries, very, very cautiously pursued, were so far successful that I could at any time produce proof that Ricci and Guardini, the two men I have spoken of, both Lombards, were Carbonari. The almost irresistible presumption, therefore, was, unless I had egregiously misunderstood their whispered muttered dialogues, in which there mingled a certain tone of suspicion and distrust, that Victor Festini was a member of the same terrible confederacy.

I was earnestly meditating how to turn such important knowledge to account—knowing, as I did by a letter from Madame Mandolo, that Victor Festini had recently returned to the Villa Nuova—when a serious accident befell me. I was passing beneath some scaffolding raised for the completion of the church called La Gran Madre di Dio, contiguous to the bridge over the Po, when a heavy stone fell upon me. I was struck to the earth, and conveyed in a state of complete insensibility to the nearest hospital. I was there declared to be mortally injured, and the Turin newspapers improving thereupon, proclaimed my death in their weekly lists of fatal accidents. It was a long struggle between life and death, full three months having elapsed before I was pronounced conva-

cent. Giacomo Marini was a frequent visitor during that long period of suffering. His natural gaiety of spirit supported and strengthened mine. My surprise—dismay, I should say—was great, therefore, when two or three days after my removal to the Hôtel de l'Europe (the patron, Trombetti, had throughout been as a father to me) he came into the room where I was sitting in sad yet thankful state of mind; with hurried faltering steps, and his face white, his lips ashen and quivering with uncontrollable emotion.

'O Giuseppe!' he tremblingly exclaimed, throwing himself into a seat. 'O Giuseppe, I have just heard news, terrible news from Savona!—Francesca!—O God!' and he burst into a passion of tears. Giacomo had loved—madly loved—my sister, though never had he interpreted his feelings by words.

My heart stood still. My dreams, my frightful forebodings, were realised.

'I have done wrong,' said Giacomo huskily; 'I should not have told you of this till you were stronger.'

'That is folly, my friend. Tell me all and quickly; fear is more terrible than fact. First, who is your informant?'

'Signor Marco. I was at the office when he got out of the diligence.'

'Signor Marco, an old gossip, but trustworthy. Well?'

‘It is believed in Savona that you are dead—were killed when you met with the accident. Victor Festini believes you were killed on the spot!’

‘Well—go on! You administer this poison drop by drop.’

‘Victor Festini is about to be married to a young and charming widow, and perhaps the richest woman in Italy, the Countess Persano—and—and Francesca is abandoned—need I say more?’ and again my true-hearted friend gave way to a paroxysm of tears.

‘You have said enough, Giacomo; except as to when Victor Festini’s marriage is expected to take place.’

‘Signor Marco said in about a month.’

It is astonishing what power a resolute will can exercise over a frame not radically enfeebled. The very next day I was out, and before the day closed, had not only confidential intercourse with Ricci and Guardini, but previously had a conversation with the Secretary of the Ministry. The Count Cavour was present, and in a slight degree assisted at it. He was not then an enemy of revolutionists, under whatever name they might be designated. I had no difficulty in proving to Ricci and Guardini that Victor Festini would, after his union with the Countess Persano, which had been some nine or ten months in contemplation, fearing to be himself compromised, reveal all

he knew of the plots or plans of the confederacy to the Government. The Count Festini was, it seemed, a comparatively needy noble in reality, large as were the estates of which he was nominal owner. The husband of the Countess Persano would have much to lose and little to gain by insurrection against the Government. Ricci and Guardini need only follow his example and would have nothing to fear. They, as I partly suspected, had for some time doubted Victor Festini's fidelity.

Madame Mandolo received me as one risen from the dead, but kindly—with tearful kindness. I embraced my sister, and should, I think, have gone mad, but for the coming triumph which, though not actually achieved, was glowing in my heart, coursing through my veins. The freshness of her young morning of life was blotted out: the glory had departed. One thing in that torturing interview consoled me. She no longer loved the villain who had deceived and betrayed her. That was balm of Gilead.

Casello Nuovo, where the magnificent marriage was to be celebrated, was at no great distance from Savona. I was soon there after leaving Francesca. Immense preparations for the great event were going on. I was not personally known to the servants, and by sending in a written message that the bearer was from Turin, with a

despatch from the Government, I was at once admitted. Never was man more startled—thunderstruck—than Victor Festini. A timid girl disporting herself amidst a parterre of flowers, suddenly confronted by a deadly serpent about to strike, could not have exhibited stronger signs of mortal terror.

‘It is useless, Victor Festini, to vow, apologise, or offer bribes. You speak to deaf ears. Either, instead of espousing the Countess Persano, you fulfil your promise—a thousand times made—of marrying the fisherman’s daughter, Francesca Ristori, or I furnish immediate proofs of your treason to the confederacy which you have betrayed. You are safe, as I told you, from my dagger. Will you be from theirs? Also quite understand that in the notarial contract of marriage, it must be distinctly set forth that your wife cannot be compelled to cohabit with you. Half the fortune to which you are or may be entitled must, by the same document, be secured to her.’

The half-maddened villain was fain to submit. His father was absent in Rome, or I should certainly not have played out the game successfully. The marriage of Victor Festini with Francesca Ristori was publicly celebrated, and immediately after the ceremony my sister returned to her aunt. It had been settled with Ricci and Guardini that Victor Festini’s violation of his oath should be

concealed from the Carbonari. This promise must have been faithfully kept, as Victor Festini died in his bed four years after his marriage. Soon after that my sister entered a convent of the Sisters of Mercy, of which she is now Lady Superior. She has regained much of her cheerfulness of spirit. It could hardly be otherwise, living, as she does, in the atmosphere of a constant self-respect.

A few days after my return to Turin, the under-prefect of police sent for me. After complimenting me upon the tact and ingenuity I had displayed in the Festini business—the story, though necessary as an introduction, has little connection with my police experiences—asked if I would enrol myself in the body under his control. The notes signed ‘Savoy,’ of which I had avowed myself to be the writer, had attracted his favourable notice. I at once agreed to the proposition, and was forthwith set to work in the unravelment of a murder, which had been committed many months before, of Madame Bartolozzi—a relative, I believe, of the Madame Vestris who was for many years a prime favourite with the English public. The murder was committed at the lady’s residence, a villa on the Collina di Torino, a range of magnificent heights, just beyond the Po, and rising nearly two thousand feet above the level of the sea. ‘If you, which I

will not doubt,' added Signor Pinelli, 'give proof of capability in this affair, which has baffled some of our most experienced officers, the road to the functions of the Haute Police will be open to you. One circumstance may give you a better chance of success than others have had, that you will not be recognised as belonging to the corps of police functionaries.'

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CHAPTER II.

MURDER OF MADAME BARTOLOZZI.

MADAME BARTOLOZZI, a lady of good property, had, I found by the perusal of the memoranda handed to me, been twice married, once when barely twenty, to Stephano Verdi, a rich proprietor, nearly double her own age, by whom she was passionately beloved. They were married in grand style at the Duomo (Cathedral), and for some months lived happily together in one of the best houses in the Piazza di San Carlo. Some disagreement took place between Signor Verdi and a favourite confidential man-servant of the name of Bergamo. A violent quarrel ensued, and before the anger of the man, who said he had been wrongfully accused, moderated, he informed Madame Verdi that her husband had a former wife, a lady whose maiden name was Rosetta Bandiera, and who was then living in her native city, Florence. He, Bergamo, had witnessed the ceremony, and had, moreover, seen the real wife of Signor Verdi but a short time previously. There had been a separation by mutual consent, and Signor Verdi paid his repudiated wife a large pension annually. She passed since the separation

under her maiden-name. A terrible scene followed upon the disclosure made by Bergamo. Signor Verdi, confronted with the man, could not deny his guilt; pleaded in extenuation his devoted love to his second wife, and that there had been a moral, if not legal, divorce between him and the first. Such excuses could not, of course, avail. A prosecution was instituted, Signor Verdi was condemned to pay a heavy fine, to several months' imprisonment, and the second marriage was formally annulled. For several years afterwards Signor Verdi was not heard of. It was said he had taken up his residence in Vienna; but if so, he must have lived there under a feigned name, as no trace of him there could be discovered. Two years after the annulment of the marriage, the lady married Signor Bartolozzi, also a large proprietor, and possessed of much villa property on the Collina di Torino. He was killed by a fall from his horse, and his widow, who had no child, inherited the whole of his wealth.

Some months subsequently, Signor Verdi returned to Turin, and took possession of his mansion in the Piazza di San Carlo. His wife had recently died at Florence; and it was conjectured that he would endeavour to induce Madame Bartolozzi to again accompany him to the altar. He did endeavour to reconcile himself with the widow; but his advances were firmly repulsed, and a rumour got about that Madame

Bartolozzi had contracted an engagement with Colonel Cialdini. This was untrue, though the report was generally credited. It was known that Signor Verdi, upon being told that such a marriage was in contemplation, was transported with rage, and swore that it should never take place. A few days afterwards Signor Verdi attempted, as he had often done before, to obtain an interview with the obdurate lady, and, as usual, was refused access to her presence. He went away muttering strange threats. In the evening of the same day Madame Bartolozzi was found dead in one of the gardens, attached to her villa. She was in the habit of walking there when the weather was fine, often till ten or eleven o'clock; and it was quite possible Signor Verdi might have known that such was her habit. The body, when found, was quite warm; and according to the testimony of the medical gentleman immediately summoned, the foul crime could not have been perpetrated more than a quarter of an hour previously. She had been stabbed in the back of the neck by some one, it was supposed, who had crept stealthily upon her from behind. The next morning, a stiletto, the blade of which was covered with blood, was found in the orchard. The assassin must, in his flight, have dropped it, or cast it away. That stiletto was proved beyond question to be Signor Verdi's. His name was graven on the blade.

The circumstantial evidence seemed conclu-

sive. Ay, at the first blush. But after Verdi's arrest, other circumstances came to light which were irreconcilable with the presumption of his guilt. Several gentlemen, the validity of whose testimony could not be doubted, deposed that on the evening in question they had seen and spoken with him in the Teatro Regio. The question of time was of course, all-important, and this was decisively in favour of Verdi. The distance from the murdered lady's residence was so great that it would have been well-nigh impossible for the murderer, if mounted upon the swiftest horse, to reach the Royal Theatre at or near the hour when it was sworn he had been seen there. Then as to the stiletto, his servants swore that about a month previous to the murder Signor Verdi had missed it, and caused a very rigid inquiry to be made respecting a weapon upon which, for some family reason, he set a high value. That, however, admitted of two interpretations. It was suggested by those who believed in the Signor's guilt that, contemplating the commission of the murder, rather than see Madame Bartolozzi married to another, by the silent stiletto, he pretended to have lost it. Yet, upon reflection, what an outrageous presumption was this! It supposed that he meant to drop or throw away the dagger after using it to murder the woman he adored! Preposterous!

There was one incident which, as I glanced

over the memoranda, startled and puzzled me. A silk handkerchief, known to belong to Signor Verdi, was, on the morrow of the murder, found in the orchard; and it was stated by the valet very reluctantly that his master, to the best of his belief, wore it on the day of the murder. It was of a peculiar pattern. All Signor Verdi could say in explanation of this ugly fact was that he was careless of handkerchiefs, was, indeed, always losing them, and must have dropped that particular one when, for the last time, he called at Madame Bartolozzi's residence. That he was constantly losing his handkerchiefs was proved; but the circumstance was not the less a very ugly one.

✕ As I read the papers a new light broke upon me. On the next day but one after the perpetration of the crime, Madame Bartolozzi was to have given a banquet on a modestly-splendid scale at her villa; and, strange to say, a burglary was reported to have been committed on the very night of the murder, and all the plate, with some trifling exceptions, carried off!

This strange coincidence had naturally struck the officers previously engaged in the investigation. All the servants of the house had been rigorously and separately examined; but nothing of importance had been elicited. Signor Verdi was still in prison awaiting his trial!

After thoroughly digesting the contents of the papers, I again waited upon M. Pinelli. He asked

if I could throw a glimmer of light upon the dark business. I answered no. Then I inquired if Bergamo was still in Signor Verdi's service. 'In his service! How, after reading the papers, can you ask such a question? It was Bergamo who betrayed him to the murdered lady, and caused him to be fined and imprisoned. He was a favourite with Madame Bartolozzi, and it was she, I believe, who gave or lent him the money to take a tavern—the Carlo Alberti, about four miles out of Turin—in which he is established.'

'There is a hint of that in the papers; and that he and the Signor Verdi are still at deadly feud. Is the man prospering?'

M. Pinelli said it was not thought so, Bergamo being an inveterate gambler. I said no more and went my way.

It will be well understood by intelligent persons, whether themselves Continental travellers or not, that the secret agents of the Public Force, which body in a certain sense corresponds to the Detective Division of the London police, have a wide range of action, and are invested with a large discretionary power which in this country would not be tolerated for a moment. The legal ligatures which should rigorously confine the executive within a prescribed course of action are in Continental Europe contemptuously cast off at the will of authority, or, if need be, severed by the sword. And this state of things is, and will be, I

fear, for more years to come than I dare contemplate, sanctioned by inexorable necessity. Especially is this the case with Italy, which Metternich, with bitter truth, before the war temporarily closed by the Treaty of Villafranca, defined as a 'geographical expression.' Yes, that was then strictly, and is still partially, true. You could not, under peril of anarchy, accord plenary liberty to that aggregation of provincial peoples, all more or less leavened with rancorous jealousies, and ever ready to have recourse, unless sternly kept in hand, to extreme measures for the redress of, alas, too real grievances. There is no *habeas corpus*, or any law resembling it, on the Continent. 'Authority' cannot be challenged, for it acts in a court of law. The Code Napoléon prevails throughout Italy, except in the States of the Church, and that code, though just in the main, may be made, as I well know, an instrument of cruel oppression, apart from the simple action of executive power. Tyranny is never so terrible as when disguised in legal formulæ. I have written these few parenthetical remarks to show the English reader that an Italian police officer is not necessarily an unscrupulous ruffian because he habitually, and without a thought about the matter, invades the liberty of the citizen. Inviolability of the person and the domicile—the life of Great Britain—is a flower which will not flourish in the sunny clime of Italy till its now stagnant, now

stormy, atmosphere has been purified, not only from the influence of alien enemies, but of domestic factions; till the country has become one in heart, mind, soil; till l'Unita Italia shall be a magnificent fact. The flower is growing rapidly, and with a healthy natural growth.

I was proud as Lucifer of the commission entrusted to me—to me, so young, not more than twenty, though no doubt being tall, robust, with a healthy swarthiness of deeper hue than even the generality of my countrymen, and possessed of hardy qualities, which I owed to my fisher life, I looked at least five years older. It was the first rung—the very lowest, it is true—upon the ladder of efficient preferment; but it was a Government appointment—assured bread—and that, in the estimation of the youth of the proletarian classes on the Continent, is a great prize in the lottery of life, which contains so many blanks.

But exultant as I was, I remembered that, *che va piano va sano*—the slow pace is the safest; the foot of the mule more to be relied on than that of the horse, and I took additional time to well consider the matter. Night brings counsel, and I slept more than once upon the matter I had in hand. The doing so changed the course of action I had impulsively determined upon. This was to proceed at once to the Carlo Alberti as an ordinary wayfarer, call for a bottle or two of the best wine,

and, as is the custom of the country, invite the landlord to join me, and question, cross-examine Bergamo, under pretence of curiosity, as to the particulars of the Bartolozzi affair. A charming device that, for entrapping such a cunning fox as Bergamo was known to be, supposing, as I strongly suspected, he had any reason for avoiding to converse about the murder.

With the full approbation of the Chief, who, by one of those caprices which one sometimes meets with in the world, had taken a strong fancy to me, I resolved to have a private interview with the accused Signor Verdi in prison. It should not be my fault if it did not prove a confidential one. The Chief, like myself, was strongly persuaded of Verdi's innocence, in spite of the sinister aspect of the evidence arrayed against him.

Signor Verdi received me with a cold haughty civility. I was greatly surprised and shocked by his appearance. He had been represented to me as a handsome middle-aged person of distinguished aspect and bearing, though strong lines of sorrow and sadness, easily accounted for, had marred the once remarkable beauty of his features. But the individual before me was an utterly broken down, wasted, emaciated man; his face was paler than marble, and wearing an expression in repose as if he were some condemned soul loosed for a time

and a purpose out of Dante's *Inferno*, and soon to return there. That he had been confined *au secret* for such a length of time could not alone have produced such a change. I was not so experienced then in the effect which secret confinement in Italian and Austrian prisons produced upon the strongest-souled man as I afterwards became. Was it, I asked myself, the consciousness of a terrible crime, or the shadow of an ineffacable despair projected over him from the untimely tomb of the beloved woman he was accused of having murdered, but for whom, as Signor M. Pinelli and very many others believed, he would have freely given his own life to shield from harm? Time would, I hoped and believed, reveal even in this world the true secret of that tomb. 'Would to heaven I may prove one of Time's agents for dragging that truth to light!' I mentally exclaimed, and with genuine fervour, so much did the Signor interest me.

I at once presented my credentials—a brief note of introduction from M. Pinelli—and frankly explained who I was, and why I came there. I told him that I firmly believed in his innocence, and was possessed of a notion that he, by being unreserved with me, or imparting to me the minutest particulars relative to the *personnel* of his own establishment, and that of Madame Bartolozzi, might enable me to hit upon some elucida-

tion of the difficulty, which would restore him to liberty. .

The voice of truthful candour rarely misses its way to the heart of an appreciative man. The Signor's suspicious look was slowly replaced by one of confidence—or a belief that I was dealing faithfully with him.

‘A clue to the mystery may, by the mercy of God and the saints,’ I continued, ‘be discovered; and possibly by me, though so young and inexperienced, you may be restored to liberty, to happiness.’

‘Happiness,’ sadly replied the Signor, ‘never! That is for ever buried in the tomb of which I am accused of having supplied the tenant. Then, as to further particulars. I know of none that I have not communicated to the cold-blooded inquisitors, who have kept me on a moral rack so many weeks without permitting me to see a single human being, not even a lawyer.’

‘The Code Napoléon, by which we are governed, permits this cruel injustice to persons accused of grave crimes and confined *au secret*. The magistrates have full discretion in such cases.’

Signor Verdi's lip curled with a sardonic smile.

‘You were born at Savona,’ said he; ‘not a place, I should suppose, where the law is highly cultivated. Your own position, you say, was a

very humble one. How then are you qualified to offer a grave opinion upon the provisions of the Code Napoléon ?

‘I had the good fortune, Signor, to render a slight service to a French gentleman, who, in return, taught me not only all the French I know, but many other things. Since I have received the humble appointment which may enable me to be of service to you, Signor, I have closely studied the Code Napoléon. I am positive that the Code allows, enjoins even, the magistrates to permit no one, except under special circumstances, to have access to a prisoner kept at their discretion *au secret*—agents of the police of course excepted.’

‘You may be right. But to the purpose. I have been perfectly frank with the examining magistrates. You have read copies of their notes. I have nothing to add.’

‘Permit me, Signor, if you please. I do not find that you, with reference to this terrible crime, make the slightest mention of Nicolo Bergamo!’

‘Curses upon Nicolo Bergamo!’ almost screamed Signor Verdi, flushing with intensest rage. ‘The serpent—the son of Satan! Why should I have polluted my lips with the miscreant’s name? What possible connection could he have had with the crime which, guiltless as I am, will send me to the guillotine? I no longer indulge

in any illusions as to my fate,' added the Signor; 'and I should be glad if the long agony would close to-morrow.'

'That is folly, permit me to say with all respect, Signor. It is true, that the evidence of your having been at the Teatro Regio on the evening of the murder is in a great degree weakened by the opinions of the doctors, who assert that the time of the lady's death could not be decided upon with any certainty; and you know, Signor, that the difference of an hour would make all the difference in your case. Still one must never lose courage. Again, as to this Bergamo?'

'Still Bergamo! Malediction upon Bergamo!'

'Be it so. But waiting for that, let us consult together about this man. He was intimately acquainted not only with the habitation of Madame Bartolozzi on the Collina, but with her daily habits; knew also that she had in her house very valuable jewelry and plate, and where it could be found. Now do you, Signor, know—have you heard that he has any acquaintance, any intimate acquaintance, with either of the servants of Madame Bartolozzi?'

'I have not. Besides, was not the unfortunate deceased the bountiful friend, the generous patroness, of Bergamo?'

'That argues nothing when one is talking of a son of Satan. I conclude that Bergamo, having

injured, hates you with all the malignancy of an evil soul.'

'Per Bacco, yes! He till now *feared*, as well as hated me, suspecting that I knew more of some doings of his in early life than I really did. The villain has no need to fear me now,' added the Signor, with bitter emphasis.

'I shall not apologise, Signor, for taking openly as I do a minute memorandum of this conversation. You say that Bergamo both feared and hated you. That, from my fixed point of view, is very important. Now I come to the chief point, as it strikes me. First—but I scarcely need ask, as Bergamo must have been well acquainted with your house, must have known where and how to make the easiest entry of a dark night, we will say, and when you were absent knew where you kept, amongst other valuables, *a stiletto upon which your name is engraved!*'

'Yes, yes! But all that leads, *can lead*, to nothing. You are clever; but, being a novice in your profession, fix your scrutiny upon circumstances that have no real significance.'

'That, Signor, remains to be proved. A circumstance, which only about two hours ago came to my knowledge, you will also perhaps deem to have no significance. This—but I must first state that the Carlo Alberti, kept by Bergamo, is but a very mediocre concern, the profits of which,

if any, are very, very slight. This I know from the proprietor of the Hôtel de l'Europe, M. Trombetti, who knows Bergamo well, and, is security for him at the Government tobacco stores. Well, this man, who is now so poor, or was a few weeks since, is negotiating the purchase of a handsome hotel, with its equipments—a very costly affair.'

'How do you know that?'

'I was in the Café San Carlo this morning and overheard two persons talking of it. They are from Milan, and are here to make inquiries respecting Bergamo—his means, character, and the rest. A Providence works these things, let sceptics sneer as they may.'

'And who shall say that a large legacy has not been bequeathed to Bergamo? It is a world for scheming scoundrels to flourish and grow rich in. Why not Bergamo? I thank you for your good wishes, your kind intentions,' added the Signor, with an air of weariness, and extending his hand to put an end to our interview; 'but good wishes, kind intentions, will avail *me* nothing. Nothing you have said or suggested has excited one throb of hope in my heart. As the Orientals say, it is written that I shall die for a crime of which I am wholly innocent. Society has often witnessed such a common catastrophe, and often will again. The cause is judged, and I accept the award, having no choice, indeed but to do so,' he added, with a pale acrid smile. 'Addio! I wish

you success in your new vocation ; but you will not win your police spurs in this affair.' .

I left the prison not in the least cast down. Signor Verdi's profound despondency did not in the least affect me. I had, however, gained much information by the interview. Bergamo hated Verdi with a mortal hate. I might have taken that for granted. .

I bent my steps towards the Hôtel de l'Europe. I wished to inform my former excellent patron, M. Trombetti, that his debtor Bergamo had become suddenly rich. M. Trombetti smiled when I repeated the conversation of the two Milanese in the Café San Carlo. .

' They must have meant some other Bergamo,' he said. ' The Bergamo you mean is at present in this house, in the café saloon, I believe. He is here to request the substitution of a bill of exchange at a considerably longer date than that which he gave me about a week since in liquidation of his debt to me. That does not give him the air of a man about to become proprietor of a fine hotel in Milan. Say, Giuseppe ?'

' I do not know. You have yourself told me that he is one of the most cunning keen-scented old foxes in all Piedmont. He may have heard that suspicion is beginning to attach to him in connection with the terrible business on the Collina. If so, his pleading poverty just now would be a crafty ruse.'

M. Trombetti shrugged his shoulders.

‘Nothing, Giuseppe, can, I see, beat that ‘suspicion,’ said he, ‘out of thy obstinate brain. Certainly I know Bergamo to be a crafty cheating rogue; but, Santa Maria, there is a long distance between a cheat and an assassin! Wilt thou see this terrible Bergamo? He is, as I said, in the public saloon.’

‘I should much like to do so; but he must not know me.’

‘Not know thee in thy present exalted capacity’—this with a good-humoured smile. ‘Certainly not. He will perhaps recognise the sharp young fellow, with the sharpest eyes and ears, who once favoured the Hôtel de l’Europe with his services. Thou needst not be seen with me even. I will go before. Follow me in two or three minutes; and if Bergamo is there, I shall be talking with him.’

If Bergamo’s face was the true index to his mind, he was a most sinister scoundrel. A beetle-browed fellow, with deep-set sloe-black eyes, and restless as they were fierce; whilst the square iron jaw showed that the hand would perform whatever the mind dictated. How could Signor Verdi have retained such a man as his personal attendant? The favour subsequently shown him by Madame Bartolozzi had of course been dictated by gratitude. He was commonly dressed, wore a capote, and

thick coarse shoes. Evidently he did not wish to pass himself off for a man wonderfully well-to-do in the world. I could well understand that.

I followed when he left the café; but learnt nothing by that. He certainly paused irresolutely, I thought, at the turning which would lead him to the Collina; but only for half a minute, and proceeded with a resolute step, as if he would not yield to some dangerous impulse. Perhaps he had noticed—for such fellows can look back between their ears and skull with but a slight turn of the head—that the *ci-devant* under-servitor at the Hôtel del'Europe was following him. Yet that could hardly be. And suppose he *had* been seized, being in Turin, with a desire to visit the villa on the Collina, and the domestics still there with whom he was doubtless familiarly acquainted! Yet why that firm-set resolute step, as if he were resisting a hazardous temptation? A trifle tight as air it might be, but one which decided me to lose no time in making the acquaintance of the servants left in charge of the Villa Belvidere. These were, I knew, two females and a gardener.

In Turin, as in all other Italian and in most Continental cities, there are kept in a dépôt at the police head-quarters an abundance of disguising costumes. Military and naval uniforms, clerical habiliments, from that of the dignified abbé to that of a mendicant friar, and the showy attire of banditti of every variety. In fact there

is no disguise which may be possibly required that the authorities do not keep for the use of their secret agents. The only disguise of the English police-officer is that of 'plain clothes;' after all the very best disguise, as the officer is not then distinguishable from the crowd of men and excites no particular attention. Still, in Italy such expedients could not have been dispensed with in my time. More than once, it is true, a disguise uniform or masquerade dress brought my neck within the hangman's clutch; but, it is equally true, it many times saved me from being summarily stabbed or shot. The secret agents of an Italian Government—I especially mean the members of the 'Laute police,' political police that is to say—always work with their lives in their hands.

Upon this occasion I assumed the uniform of an officer of the *Persaglieri*; and so tricked out, and not a little proud of my appearance—I was very young, do not forget—I pursued my way to the Villa Belvidere. I came to view the place as the agent of a relative, who, if my report were favourable, would no doubt be a purchaser. This was sufficient introduction, and I was shown over the place by the youngest of the woman servants, who was called Amina. The gardener, a youngish man of sullen determined aspect, so named her in my hearing. It struck me that glances of a peculiar intelligence were directed from him to the

remarkably good-looking Amina, though her dark southern eyes flashed with the light of more than thirty summers, I was sure. There was no reciprocity. Of that also I felt certain. It was steel and flint, and the steel could not extract, and never would extract, one spark of sympathetic fire from the flint. I thought Bartolo was to be congratulated upon that. Amina was handsome to a certain degree, but wore a hard, worldly, yet sensuous aspect. The thin firmly-shut lips indicated a woman that would be her husband's master as well as wife, or there would be an unquiet household. Her voice, too, was harsh, a grating, rasping voice; and I had then, as now, an almost religious faith in voices as indicating character.

The woman was very polite and closely attentive to me, would not leave me alone with Bartolo, who, it suddenly occurred to me, was really her husband. There was nothing in their demeanour towards each other to contradict that notion. I presently had no doubt of it. At that age I was very impulsive, jumped hastily at conclusions. It being her duty or pleasure to show me over the grounds, we passed together into the orchard where Madame Bartolozzi was murdered. I recognised the spot from the description given of it in the papers, and when close to it, I said suddenly,

'Ah, it was here that Madame Bartolozzi was stabbed by a dastardly assassin!' looking

hard at Amina as I uttered the words very distinctly.

The woman's face changed to the hue of saffron, and I thought she would have fainted. Fiercely recovering herself, she said, with badly-assumed calmness in that harsh voice of hers :

' Yes, you are correct. It *was* near about this spot.'

' Your husband,' I went on to say, I can hardly conceive under what impulse, ' your husband being here at the time—' Saints and angels, why does the woman scream and stagger as if suddenly pierced with a poniard, whilst her eyes glare at me as if about to start from their sockets? Could it be possible that Bartolo was the murderer?

The woman again quickly rallied by force of indomitable will.

' My husband !' she exclaimed with tremulous vehemence. ' My husband ! I have never had, never intend to have, a husband. What do you mean ?'

' I mean simply that the notion occurred to me that Bartolo might be your husband—'

' Bartolo *my* husband !' interrupted the woman, with a burst of derisive laughter, and a feeling of relief too—a half-blind man could have seen that. ' Bartolo *my* husband ! Ay, truly, as much as you are an officer of Bersaglieri,' and she laughed again with malicious glee.

Hot blood flushed my face at this taunt. The

abominable woman had been secretly laughing, then, at my attempt to pass myself off as a military officer! It must have been my rolling sailor-gait, thought I, which betrayed me; for certainly when surveying myself before a mirror, I thought I could defy detection.

‘If Bartolo is as certainly your husband,’ I retorted, not a little nettled, ‘as that I am an officer of Bersaglieri, the poor fellow has taken a precious Tartar to wife.’ ‘What I was about to say,’ I added, with serious sternness, ‘what I was about to say, Madame Amina, when you interrupted me with a scream of terror—real terror, the interpretation of which may some day be found—was this: Your husband Bartolo, as I for the moment imagined, no matter for that, having been in the grounds when the blood shed here, and now crying to Heaven for vengeance, and in more piercing tones than ever, Madame Amina—I say it was a pity that if he could not have prevented the murder, he did not arrest the murderer or *murderess*.’

The woman was again terribly agitated; the mocking smile vanished, the white lips quivered, and a ghastly pallor overspread her face. I had no longer the slightest doubt that Madame Amina was directly connected with the crime.

‘I need not prolong my stay, Madame Amina; I have learned all I desired to know.’

The woman followed in a kind of furtive apprehensive fashion. Near the back portion of the house

Bartolo was at work digging. He paused from labour, and darted a glance of flame at Amina; the man; I saw, was devoured with rage and jealousy. Something might be made of that.

'Ah,' said I, 'I must not leave after giving so much trouble without bestowing a *buona mana*;' and I placed a coin near a franc in value in his hand. 'It is probable you will be soon out of a situation,' I added significantly, 'and if so I may be able to help you to another. Call and ask for me at the Hôtel de l'Europe; demand to see Lieutenant Giuseppe.'

After returning my usurped uniform to the dépôt, I took a walk in a direction where I should probably at that hour meet with my friend Giacomo. He was a shrewd clever fellow, and had been all along in my confidence. His love-fit had subsided and he could talk reasonably and calmly, even about Francesca. I met him as I expected, and we strolled on together. I related minutely all that had passed at the Villa Belvidere. He listened, as he always did, with absorbed attention, the Verdi affair greatly interesting him. I asked his opinion before giving mine.

'Madre di Dio!' he replied, 'my opinion is very decided. I may be wrong, but to me it is as plain as the stone nose of Duke Amadeo (we were passing through the Piazza del Palazzo). This Madame Amina was an accomplice in the murder

of her mistress. Bergamo, as I have always suspected, the actual assassin. More than that, Bergamo, not Bartolo, is Amina's husband !' •

I held my breath with surprise. The thought had not crossed my brain. Giacomo continued :

' The abandonment by Bergamo of his purpose of purchasing an hotel in Milan, if it ever was a serious purpose, has been caused by his having heard some whisper that suspicion has fallen upon him. After what has passed between you and his wife to-day, you must be quick in what you do, if anything can be done. I am in doubt regarding Bartolo,' continued my friend, ' whether his rage is caused by a real jealousy, or that he fears he shall be robbed of his share of the plunder. He may be the dupe of Bergamo, or his wife and he may be accomplices. Why not have all three arrested provisionally, on the public safety principle ? They would be placed *au secret*, examined separately, and the truth might be wrenched or wheedled out of them.' •

' They were all three separately and rigorously examined at the commencement of the investigation, but nothing was elicited that in the opinion of the magistrates would justify their detention ; one reason being no doubt that the guilt of Signor Verdi was assumed to be unquestionable. I do not share your doubts about Bartolo—am far, indeed, from doing so. •But, as you say, no time should be lost ; I will see M. Pinelli at once and,

endeavour to prevail upon him to arrest Bergamo and Madame Amina this very night.'

It was then about four o'clock. P.M. in the month of June. The chief was away upon an expedition that would prevent his return to Turin before the morning, and there was no one else that could act. I must wait. As I emerged from the office I was startled by the sight of Madame Amina on the opposite side of the street. Our eyes met, and she walked swiftly away. Diavolo! She had no doubt been watching me, and guessed my errand at the police barrack. The birds were indeed alarmed, and would take wing before we could possibly throw a net over them. There was one consolation: the passport office was closed, and without passports it would be difficult for them to pass the frontier. They might certainly have a chance of getting away by sea, but that is a mode of transit which Italians, except those who live on the sea-board, would scarcely think of. Besides, they would have to thread the passes of the Maritime Alps! No, no, without passports they could not get away—a conclusion, be it said in passing, which could only have been arrived at by a greenhorn; passports, as I well knew, when but a few months older, being merely vexatious obstructions to honest travellers, but not of the slightest avail to facilitate the capture of a practised rogue.

As usual, when not better employed, I passed

an hour or two in the afternoon at the Café de l'Hôtel de l'Europe. Upon going in I told the principal waiter that if anybody inquired for Lieutenant Giuseppe, I was the individual wanted.

Less than an hour had passed away, and I was playing a quiet game of dominoes with one of the *habitués* for a *demi-tasse*, when word was brought me that a man was ~~was without~~ who wanted to see Lieutenant Giuseppe. So soon, thought I, jumping up: I was out of the café in a moment.

It was the gardener Bartolo who wanted me. He looked fearfully agitated, and in a low shaking voice asked if we could speak together where it was impossible we should be overheard. I bade him follow, and led the way to a small apartment at the back of the hotel.

'Now,' said I, 'your business with me; what is it?'

'First, please to order some brandy,' said he, in the same shaky voice. Seeing that his agitation was real, I had the brandy brought in; he half emptied the carafe, and swallowed what he poured out at a gulp. 'Ah,' said he, colour returning to his cheeks, firmness to his tone, 'that is the stuff to string up one's nerves; I can go on now. You are a secret agent of the police?' he added, sharply regarding me.

'Who told *you* so? Madame Amina?'

'No one told me so. Nicolo Bergamo—'

'Nicolo Bergamo! Well, go on.'

‘Nicolo Bergamo, who was at the Villa Belvidere when you were, a few hours ago, though he took care you should not see him, had discovered your secret. No sooner had you left, than he and Amina were in close secret conversation with each other. Now I hate, loathe, abhor Bergamo,’ added the gardener, with ferocious, flashing rage, and striking the table with his heavy fist. ‘By all the demons of hell I would kill him, were it not for the law!’

‘I can easily believe that; perhaps you can kill him with the aid of the law. I hope so.’

‘That is my errand to you. Bergamo murdered Madame Bartolozzi with his own hand, though he had a confederate with him. Amina let them quietly in at the orchard gate, and stood looking on. I also saw it all, but dared not interfere. Amina, from some expressions I let drop the same evening, discovered that I had witnessed the bloody deed, and so wrought upon me by tears and promises, that I took an oath of secrecy. I should have told you that Madame Bartolozzi had some time before discovered some villany on the part of Bergamo, and had forbidden him to approach her. This was why Amina was obliged to let him and his accomplice quietly in at the garden gate.’

‘And Bergamo had contrived to secretly enter the house in the Palazzo Nuovo, and steal the stiletto?’

‘Yes.’

‘And with respect to the handkerchief?’

‘Signor Verdi dropped it as he left the house; Amina found it; perhaps she picked his pocket—she is nimble fingered.’

‘Enough—more than enough,’ said I, rising; ‘both murderer and murderess shall be lodged in prison before they are two hours older.’

‘Piano, piano, Lieutenant Giuseppe! You are too late for that, without my aid.’

‘Too late! are you mad? Why, they have no passports.’

‘Passports! what signifies about passports? They are gone, and you and all the police in Turin could not, without my aid, unearth such a cunning fox as Nicolo Bergamo. Besides, I have to make a little bargain for myself.’

I requested him to speak out plainly all he had to say. He did so. As soon as I left the Villa Belvidere, Bergamo and Amina held a private consultation, at which Bartolo secretly assisted, by listening outside. My casual remarks, which I was an idiot to have made, had thoroughly alarmed them both. Bartolo learned, for the first time, that they were man and wife, and that preparations for flight having been for some time made, instant departure could alone ensure their safety. They had a notion that they might be arrested that very night. Bartolo found, moreover, that he and one Minghi, for-

merly one of the vetturini of T~~he~~an, were to be defrauded of their shares of the plunder. The gardener admitted that he and Minghi had been accomplices with Bergamo in the robbery, though guiltless of the murder, with respect to which I had my own opinion. Terribly enraged, very naturally, was Bartolo; especially as he did not hear them mention what direction they meant to take, nor where the plate had been so long successfully hidden. Not in Bergamo's house, for that had been searched from roof to cellar soon after the murder, by order of M. Pinelli. But though he, Bartolo, did not know, he was quite sure Minghi did, and if he once learned from him, Bartolo, that they were to be betrayed and plundered by Bergamo and Amina, he would at once give all the information necessary to effect the capture of the fugitives.

'Minghi is to be found any evening,' added Bartolo, handing me a scrap of paper, written and subscribed in a sort of hieroglyphic writing, 'in a well-known tavern. Let that paper be placed in his hand, and a few hours afterwards you may, if you will, have the assassin and his wife safe by the heels.'

'What is the name of this tavern, and where is it situated?'

The gardener greeted my question with a smile of diabolic cunning.

'That,' said he, 'I will tell you when I have

it under your own hand that I and Minghi shall not only be favourably dealt with, but receive a heavy reward for our services.'

'Are you mad? What power have I to make such a treaty?'

'Never mind; Minghi and I will be satisfied with it. Remember you must go *alone* to see Minghi,' added the transparent ruffian, whom a child might have seen through. 'If more than one person entered the house, no Minghi would be found, nor will you see him till that piece of paper has reached him through the landlord.'

The sun at noon of a summer day is not more palpable to mortal sight than was to mine the shallow artifice concocted between Bergamo, his wife or paramour, and Bartolo. A common terror had made them forget or postpone their angry differences. The truth, no doubt, was, they were *not* prepared for flight; twenty-four hours' time gained would make the difference of life and death to them; and they evidently believed, after Amina had seen me enter, and immediately come out of the head office, then saunteringly make my way to the Café of l'Hôtel de l'Europe, that if I could be entrapped—put out of the way, silenced for ever would be best—that that supreme object might be gained, I not having communicated, as they believed, with the police since I returned from the Villa Belvidere.

'You are playing a very bold, very rash game,

Bartolo,' said I; 'no wonder you trembled when about to hazard the first throw. Of course you know that you may be arrested this moment, upon your own confession, in which case adieu, in this world, to Julio Bartolo! I now remember seeing your name, as well as those of your confederates in crime; and, I think, that of Minghi also, in the depositions, but I had forgotten them. It strikes me as rather remarkable that Madame Bartolozzi should have surrounded herself with such a choice lot of ruffian servants, male and female.'

The tremor relieved by the brandy again came over the gardener, when I spoke of his immediate arrest. He emptied the carafe this time, not without effect.

'Bergamo, when he was high in favour with Madame Bartolozzi, introduced me and Amina to her service. As to my confession,' he added, glancing furtively round, 'there are no witnesses here, and I should deny every word.'

'We will pass from that. Now what is the name of the tavern where Minghi may be found this evening? It's growing late, but there will be an early moon. O, you want the document; very well.'

Writing materials were obtained, and I scrawled out the required undertaking, not, of course, worth the ink with which it was written. Bartolo knew that as well as I did. To pretend

he did not was another of his devices to induce a belief on my part in his simple sincerity. Fools! Perhaps had more time been allowed them, they might have concocted some cleverer scheme.

‘Minghi may be found,’ said Bartolo, ‘at the San Filippo, about two leagues distant, on the high road to Novara.’

‘I know the San Filippo—that is to say, I have passed it frequently. I shall start at once.’

The ruffian’s eyes sparkled.

‘To make all safe, it will be essential to do so.’

I rose and went round to the stables. Bartolo hurried out, and took up a position of observation at as safe a distance as was compatible with watching if I should take the direct road to Novara, or call first at the police barrack.

The horse was ordered; I had an explanatory conversation with M. Trombetti, rode forth, and dashed at a smart pace in the direction of the San Filippo tavern. The hope for which I encountered the risk—not such a very great risk either—was that Bergamo and his wife would be not long after me at the San Filippo, a house of notorious ill-repute, in order, not only to make suré with their own eyes that I was safely trapped, but to make mirth for themselves at my credulous folly! Bartolo would also, I felt pretty certain, be there. It was, however, a very rash proceeding on my part; the act of a young novice in his pro-

fession. I ought to have at once arrested Bartolo. That would have answered every purpose without peril to myself.

There was no one except the pot-bellied cadaverous-faced landlord to be seen within or without the San Filippo. He, however, bustled about, conducted me into his best room, brought me a bottle of wine, and then went out to put up my horse.

Presently I heard gruff voices talking, though in a subdued tone, to the landlord, almost immediately followed by the barring up of the house for the night. The shooting of bolts and fixing of bars were not pleasant sounds; and I had a suspicion that in the end, which crowns all works, it would turn out that I should be duped and fooled instead of those with whom I had engaged in so hazardous a game of plot and counterplot. Well, it's of no use crying after yesterday, so I took a long pull at the wine-flask—one I had brought with me, not that placed upon the table by the worthy landlord; I uncorked it, however, and softly poured a portion of its contents out of a window of which the shutters had not been closed. That done, I looked well to the priming of my pistols, then rang the sonette on the table. The landlord came in.

'You close early,' I remarked, with as much indifference as I could assume.

‘Yes, Signor, that has always been the custom at the San Filippo.’

‘You are not overcrowded with guests, I perceive.’

‘No, Signor; for a long time the house has been deserted. I leave in a few days.’

I then asked him to deliver the paper I brought to Minghi. He promised to do so the moment that person arrived, which might possibly be in less than an hour. ‘I said that would do. The moon would soon rise, my horse would be well rested, and I should have a pleasant ride back to Turin. A grim smile darkly lit up the fellow’s face for a moment, the meaning of which I thoroughly understood. He asked if the signor would take supper. I ordered him to bring in what cold provisions he had. The table was served, and I sat down to it, for I was hungry with the ride, but in a very dubious uncomfortable state of mind. I had tried the door of the room, and found it locked on the outside.

The hour passed, still no Minghi made his appearance, nor any one else. Another half-hour fled, and the house remained perfectly still. Trombetti I was sure would not fail me, and fortifying myself with that thought, I, having finished my own flask of wine, ventured upon the vintage of the San Filippo.

Whether the wine was drugged or not, I cannot say; but I fell asleep, and was awakened by a

slight noise at the narrow window, of which, as I have said, the shutters had not been closed. No very powerful opiate could therefore have been mixed with the landlord's wine. Turning hastily, my back being towards the casement, I saw Madame Amina's mocking exultant face, framed, as it were, in the narrow aperture.

It was as instantly withdrawn. Loud laughter followed on the outside, mingled with the gruff voices of several men, amongst which I distinctly recognised that of Bartolo. Part of my hope had certainly been fulfilled, the confederacy of assassins had all come to the appointed rendezvous; but the most interesting portion of the mental programme—that I, as a living man, should assist in their capture—seemed to be very doubtful.

I prepared for the worst—every man does when fairly at bay. I had a double-barrelled pistol in each of my trousers pockets. I drew the heavy table anglewise across a corner of the room, placing myself between it and the wall. It thus formed a sort of barricade, though one not difficult to force.

Presently one big black-browed ruffian, whom I had never seen before, leapt through the casement; he proved to be Minghi. Bartolo followed, and then Bergamo, then two new stranger-scoundrels. Madame Amina came last, gallantly helped through by her husband.

Diavolo ! what a ferocious discordant chorus of triumph did they howl in my half-stunned ears—the woman being the fiercest and most furious of all—mingled with sarcastic congratulations upon the success of Lieutenant Giuseppe's first attempt in his new vocation !

'He is come for the booty,' roared Bergamo, 'for the plate, the jewels, as well as for us. What a nose to scent out treasure the lieutenant must have ! He knew it was all in the cellar down-stairs, neatly coopered up in wine casks. He has a brilliant career before him, gloomy as he looks just now ! I would wager a hundred florins that he will be chief commissioner within five years !'

A loud shout greeted this coarse pleasantry, hushed by the fish-wife voice of the woman Amina.

'Let this farce, pleasant as it is, be finished !' she exclaimed, with an authoritative air, and she immediately retired to the most distant part of the large room. The supreme moment was come.

I drew forth my pistols, cocked them with my thumbs, and determined that at all events I would not die alone. Every one of the ruffians drew forth a double-barrelled pistol. My chance of life was a sorry one, and I mentally breathed a prayer for succour to the Holy Virgin, which had been taught me by my mother. I have never been a very religious person ; but no man is a mocker when standing on the edge of a grave which yawns for him.

The villains paused. It was pretty certain that one or more of them would bite the dust, and as none could tell upon whom the death-lot would fall, they hesitated. Not for more than half a minute. One ruffian, aiming from behind his fellows, fired. 'The ball grazed my right ear. I pulled trigger, but missed also. A bullet from, I think, Bergamo's pistol struck me on the shoulder, and I fell on the floor from the violence of the shock or blow, tasting the full bitterness of death.

' They were dragging the table away, when the report of a carbine rang through the apartment simultaneously with the death-scream of one of the assassins, and in another half-minute the place was half-filled with soldiers. Trombetti had not failed me. I was saved.

The plate, &c. which had been carried off, and so long successfully concealed, was found in the cellar of the San Filippo, as Bergamo had tauntingly intimated. The landlord had, as a matter of course, been secured. Bergamo and Bartolo were executed. Amina was sentenced to imprisonment with forced labour for life—a heavier punishment. The same fate was awarded to Minghi.

Signor Verdi was, it need hardly be said, liberated after the completion of certain formalities; but life with him was all but extinct. It flickered in the worn socket but two or three months longer. He was found dead early one

morning, kneeling at the tomb of Madame Bartolozzi ; his staring eyes, fixed in death, seemed, when he was found, to be still perusing the graven record of her early untimely death. The day previously was the anniversary of that death, and he had remained out all night—one of those cold freezing nights, with which Turin, from its vicinity to the Alps, is so often visited.

CHAPTER III.

ON SECRET SERVICE IN THE APENNINES.

THE French Revolution of 1848 had burst forth. The moral lava, liberated by that tremendous upheaval of a mighty nation, rolled in floods over Europe, everywhere finding aliment to feed its destructive and fertilising fires. Princes who rested their pretensions solely on the dogma of Divine Right were either swept away by the volcanic tempest, or were content to retain their crowns by a new consecration—the baptism of freedom.

The successful insurrection of Milan, and the passionate clamour of his people, forced Carlo Alberto to declare war against Austria, and though his heart was not in the cause, he led his troops to attack her. But whilst he combated the Austrians, what forces could he array against the Republicans, moderate Republicans, extreme Republicans, red Republicans, all of whom he equally hated and feared, with whom Piedmont, with all the rest of Italy, swarmed? He had no power to attack them openly. He must await his time; and, meanwhile, inform himself of their plans, their organisation; get at the muster-roll of their

staff; then when opportunity served he would know how and where to strike.

The police of Piedmont—a select number of them, that is to say—were the instruments chosen to carry out that task; and I was one of the first on the list. I did not like the work, but as it fell within the legitimate range of my sworn duty, I, though not with a very good grace, acquiesced.

I called one forenoon, in accordance with routine usage, on the chief for instructions. He had many visitors that morning, so that it was about two hours before I was admitted to his cabinet. ‘Giuseppe,’ said he, ‘come again about three o’clock. I am tired now, and must have a long talk with thee. The mission I have to confide to thee is a difficult and arduous one. Three o’clock, remember; be punctual.’

I entered M. Pinelli’s cabinet precisely as the clock chimed the appointed hour. The chief was there, and entirely disengaged. He bade me seat myself, and at once plunged into the business on hand. ‘Did I know anything of Latin?’ ‘Nothing whatever, except the Church Service.’ ‘That will do. Hundreds of very worthy priests know no more. Can you run the Confiteor, the Laudamus, the Creed, the Psalms, pretty smoothly off your tongue?’ ‘Yes, I think so, though I have not been to church very constantly of late.’

‘Let me hear— There—there, that will do—that will do,’ said he, laughing.

‘Now then, as to the mission I am about to confide to thy zeal, courage, and discretion,’ he continued. ‘It is well known to all that this kingdom, that all Italy, is mined with secret conspiracies. The conspirators, however much they may differ on minor points, are all agreed in one—hatred of monarchy; and, strange to say, our constitutional king, Carlo Alberto—he who is now, at their clamorous bidding, braving in arms the whole power of Austria—they appear to hate the most of all. I do not understand it; but such is the fact, and we must deal with it. Now, there are, we suspect—are sure, indeed—many men in Piedmont, in this very city of Turin, men of fortune and position, highly-placed men—favoured courtiers even—who conceal beneath the mask of a devoted loyalty the rankest Republicanism. It will be your duty to *unmask* these hypocrites.’

‘I, Signor Pinelli! Why, I am a comparative stranger in Turin, and have no more acquaintance with its notabilities, personal or otherwise, than they have with me.’

‘So much the better. Your task will be all the easier, and less dangerous. Do not interrupt; listen, not with your ears only, but with your understanding. The clergy as a rule are, we know, ultra-royalists in a general sense, though by no means devoted to the King of Piedmont. One-tenth of the priests—a less percentage than that,

perhaps—are, however, Republicans ; and, once a priest does shake off his allegiance to the throne, he invariably becomes the most furious of zealots in the cause which he has newly embraced. Witness the Abbé de la Mennais, and a hundred others. This is emphatically the case with Quarantelli, abbot of the monastery of Santa Maria Maggiore, situate in one of the passes of the Apennines, and who frequently, very frequently of late, favours the people of Turin with his visits and his sermons.’

‘I have heard Quarantelli spoken of as a man of pure devout life, as well as an eloquent preacher.’

‘There is no doubt about that. He is not, however, considered quite orthodox by his clerical brethren even in religious doctrine. But that is not *our affair*. He is a most determined Republican of the Mazzinian stamp.’

‘Since, then, it is so well known, my services will not be required.’

‘Not quite so fast, if you please, Giuseppe. You have not heard half your lesson yet. Listen, I repeat, with your understanding as well as your ears. The monastery of Santa Maria Maggiore has, it is well known, a far-and-wide reputation for sanctity. There are holiest relics—the chief of the Turin police crossed himself devoutly—there are holiest relics there, which are efficacious, some say, in restoring to health the halt, the lame, and

the blind. Perhaps so; God knows. It is certain that a constant stream of pilgrims is always flowing to and from Santa Maria Maggiore. Now, any one can be nearly blind, and passably lame, if he likes. The disguise may be made complete, whilst the pretence for frequenting the church is quite plausible. Well, we have positive information that there are monthly meetings of Republicans of all shades held in the monastery, or, if not precisely within the precincts of the sacred edifice, in Quarantelli's dwelling-house, adjoining to which, of course, there is an entrance from the church. Once assembled, and the doors secured, the crutch, the blind over the eyes, or whatever disguise may have been worn, are cast off, and the assembly becomes a political confederacy of the most dangerous kind. Many Piedmontese, as I have told thee, do, we are morally sure, attend these monthly meetings. It will be thy task to attend also, and report to me all that thou shalt see and hear.'

'Santa Maria, Signor! What is this you require of me? Would not my intrusion for such a purpose into the sacred edifice be something like sacrilege—Judas sacrilege?'

'Absurd. This will be thy plan of action; I have well considered, and finally adopted it. Thy disguise will be that of a Carmelite friar.'

'A Carmelite friar!' 'I bluntly broke in.

‘Why, Signor, this is worse still. And the ton-
sure?’

‘O, the hair will soon grow again upon your shaved crown after the task is accomplished.’

‘That is agreeable—charming, Signor; but I should esteem it a singular favour if you would select some one else. Those Republican gentlemen boast of being men of action, and the gorges of the Apennines are deep; and—’

‘No trifling, Giuseppe. You have been selected, after consideration, for the duty, and must fulfil it. The selection is a compliment to you.’

‘I would willingly decline such flattering compliments, Signor. I shall certainly be detected.’

‘So much the worse for thee. Thou must be careful, for it is true the gorges of the Apennines are deep and dark; and if thou shouldst chance to be toppled down one of them, we, thy friends, should not even be able to give thee Christian burial. But I have no more time to waste in this babbling. Thy name will be Brother Enrico Saffi, expelled by the ultra priests of the Carmelite monastery of San Bartolomeo, near Panga, for thy liberal boldly-avowed opinions. The real Enrico Saffi, who was so expelled a very short time since, died two days ago in the Fever Hospital in this city. We have his papers, which will fully establish your seeming identity. His robe, too, will be at your service.’

‘Saints and angels, Signor!’ I remonstrated, in a real panic; ‘what are you proposing? The robe—the papers of a man who died in a Fever Hospital!’

‘Pshaw! They shall be fumigated. We have no old Carmelite robes; and a new one might excite suspicion. Go and get your head shaved. Let it be the exact Carmelite tonsure. I suggest these precautions for your own sake. Be here to-morrow at noon for final instructions. You start towards evening. There is no time to spare, as the monthly meeting of conspirators takes place within a week—’

‘But, Signor,’ I again ventured to remonstrate. ‘My Latin will never pass—’

‘To the Inferno with your Latin, and you too. Let me have no more of this, or I shall begin to think that the hero of the San Filippo affair was once brave by chance in his life. Now begone. And Giuseppe,’ added the iron-hearted chief, with a peculiar meaning smile, ‘tell Dava to come to me. I have a commission for him. Our own barber, mind, must shave your head. He is an adept, he told me, at the Carmelite tonsure, which is somewhat peculiar. Adios.’

I knew perfectly well what the chief meant by bidding me send him Dava. There was a small corps of detective officers belonging to our body, whose sole duty it was to watch *us*. He would receive instructions to have *me* closely watched,

and escape would, I knew, be perfectly impossible even had I been inclined to attempt it, which I probably, upon reflection, should not have been. The fever-robe and papers, the tonsure, were the worst. Still I had no choice but to submit. It occurred to me that I might as well have stuck to the fishing business.

Whoever, being an adult, has had his head shaved, particularly if, like mine, his hair was remarkably thick and strong, will understand the titillating torture I underwent at the hands of the barber, and he jumping about all the while with delight, congratulating himself upon the progress and perfection of his work. It was over at last; and I hastened to my lodgings to compose myself by calling up all the philosophy I was master of, some wine, and cigars. Those remedies prevailed after a time. I resigned myself, sought to fix my mind upon the considerable money reward I was sure to receive in the event of success, and having attained a tolerably calm state of mind determined to go at once and take leave, for a time, of Marietta; but not—for she was tenderness itself—hint at the perilous nature of the mission I had been compelled to undertake.

I approached a mirror in the room to arrange my dress, and started back with affright and consternation at sight of my tonsured skull. How, in the name of Lucifer, could I present myself before Marietta in that guise? I must leave on

my errand, probably of death, without being able to bid her adieu. I am not a man of tears, but I shed many bitter ones that night. I should have to take leave of her by letter. What impression would that make upon her?

I waited upon M.^{re} Pinelli the next day with so rueful an aspect that he burst into a fit of laughter, partly excited no doubt by the queer figure I cut by the loss of the black curly locks of which I had been so vain. I knew, if ever I saw Turin, two or three years of assiduous cultivation would be required to restore them to their luxuriance and beauty. Maledetta! I considered myself an extremely ill-used man, and I told the chief so. He but laughed the more.

'Brother Enrico Saffi,' said he, restraining his mirth, putting on his official face, and pointing to a dirty, torn, black rag, 'there is your Carmelite robe. It has been well fumigated by Coragio. You may defy fever. Here are the papers. They also have been scientifically purified. It's a nice black cross, not too heavy, neither is the iron girdle. This hair-cloth shirt to be worn next the skin,' added the chief, fixing his eyes upon the garment, for the simple reason that he could not look me in the face, 'this hair-cloth shirt, which must be worn next the skin, is nearly new, and never was worn by poor Enrico Saffi. I wish,' he added, with mock consideration, 'that it were not absolutely necessary for the proper sustainment

of your character as a Carmelite monk of the reformed order that you should walk barefoot, the way being rough and flinty, and the distance rather considerable.'

'Do not imagine, Signor Pinelli,' said I, convulsed with rage, and hardly able to curb my tongue into civility, 'do not imagine, Signor Pinelli, that I am going to wear a hair-cloth shirt next my skin and walk barefoot to that accursed monastery—'

'Blaspheme not,' sternly interrupted the chief. 'Take care, Giuseppe!'

'I did not mean that, Signor. What I meant and mean to say is, that I will *not* wear a hair-shirt, or walk barefoot. Any reasonable service I am willing to render, but patience, obedience, like everything else, have their limits.'

'Reasonable or unreasonable, Giuseppe, you must perform the service for which you have been selected, or take the consequences, which, I need not tell *you*, will be serious. It is a service of a very temporary kind. You will be back in Turin before a fortnight has passed, and the reward in the event of success will be handsome; enough to enable you to wed a certain charming damsel I have heard of.'

To finish with this part of the business, it is enough to say that I was finally bullied and cajoled into submission, and in less than two hours afterwards found myself toiling, with bruised and bleed-

ing feet, along the road to Santa Maria Maggiore, in the exact costume of a Carmelite monk of the reformed order. My provisions for the journey consisted of a little grissini (Piedmontese bread) about a handful of pulse, carried in a small leathern bag, suspended at the iron girdle, and my drink was the pure water of the Alpine streams. Never, surely, was a Government officer so sorely tried before. I wished Carlo Alberto was—well, in my place.

Before leaving the chief, he had given such clear descriptions of the persons most strongly suspected by the royal authorities, that I should have but little difficulty in identifying them. I was also solemnly assured that no punishment would, in consequence of any revelation I might make, fall upon the inculpated persons. The King indeed was utterly powerless to punish Republicans, as such. What he required to know was, who were his friends and who his enemies; who were playing him false or at least playing a double game, and who were really loyal to the House of Savoy.

There comes an end to all sublunary things. Joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure, are no longer joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure, when they are once passed. The infernal pilgrimage, or whatever may be its more legitimate designation, was at last accomplished. I reached Santa Maria

Maggiore in a most pitiable state; was kindly received by the good Quarantelli, and by his orders instantly ministered to by a lay brother. Never shall I forget the exquisite delight I felt when, after partaking of a delicious but simple refreshment, and my feet had been bathed, I stretched my weary limbs upon the coarse pallet of the cell which had been assigned me. It was Elysium.

I had not yet risen the next day, though it was high noon when the abbot paid me a visit. He returned me the papers which I had placed in his hands, said he had often heard Enrico Saffi highly spoken of by persons whose opinions he valued; and he was rejoiced that I had selected his monastery as at least my temporary resting place. Though a priest himself, and he trusted a conscientious one, there was no tyranny, he said, so detestable to him as priestly tyranny. 'Ah! well remembered,' said he, checking himself—'Brother Stanzoni, one of our fraternity, has spoken of you highly. He has heard you preach more than once.' 'Didn't that give me a heart-quake? A cold perspiration broke out of every part of my frame. 'He is absent just now on an important mission, and will not return in less than a month. You will see him then.' Respite! Reprieve! at the foot of the scaffold!

The good abbot, a known foe to asceticism, insisted that I should put off the hair-cloth shirt, and, in short, assume the decent habiliments of

the brotherhood of Santa Maria Maggiore. My heart leaped with joy ! I burned the rag of a cloak, the shirt, with an almost childish exultation. And should I be base enough to betray this good man or his friends—would it be possible that I, tempted beyond my strength in various ways, should succumb to that temptation ? I heartily prayed the Holy Virgin (the reader smiles, but, like most others, I am of my mother's religion) to intercede for me that I might not be guilty of such black ingratitude, for I distrusted myself.

The time of the monthly assemblage arrived, and certainly there was a considerable influx of visitors on that day and the one before. The majority wore shades over their eyes, many limped, and all were more or less carefully disguised. These devices were reluctantly acquiesced in by the honest abbot, who himself had nothing to conceal, because he knew that as long as men are men, thousands who are well able to help in the good cause, and will perhaps do so when the decisive hour strikes, love to keep themselves in the shade till it does strike, and there is a good chance of success. Not a high principle of action, we must agree ; but he who has fixed his mind upon the attainment of what he believes to be a high and holy consummation must be content to work with such materials as he can command, or resign himself to forego the attainment of that high and holy purpose.

The political conclave—an assemblage of some fifty or sixty Republicans of all shades—was held in the largest apartment of the abbot's house, the doors of which were constantly locked; yet was it, in all respects, a political meeting such as men any day may hold openly in London without exciting the slightest remark. The topics were legitimate, the discussion calm and reticent. At its conclusion certain resolutions were passed, and subscriptions to a considerable amount handed in, and the visitors retired to the very homely night-accommodation provided for them.

There were eight Turin gentlemen present, whom I in a moment recognised from Pinelli's striking descriptions. These I had no objection to see and recognise—these I had no scruples of conscience about. They were court-sycophants all eight of them, in receipt of large incomes from Piedmont, filched from the national treasury—legally, of course—and having no fixed principle whatever, except that of being always on the winning side, whichever that side might be. Others who might have been there I either did not, could not, or would not see. Pinelli's insistence that I should in every minutiae have the appearance of a genuine Carmelite friar—of the real Enrico Saffi—was not, as I had sometimes thought, a cruel pleasantry on his part. No one was admitted to the political conference, I observed, about whose fidelity to the Republican cause the slightest

doubt was entertained. All had been furnished, at one time or other, with what appeared to be unquestionable testimonials of their real, if masked, devotion to the cause of *Unita Italia*. The false Enrico Saffi passed in unchallenged. To have affected to doubt *him* would have been an insulting absurdity, known so well by reputation as he was by the venerable abbot.

I had earned the promised reward. Carlo Alberto's Ministers would know how to treat the eight pilgrims to the shrine of Santa Maria Maggiore. The King himself was still absent with the army, from which (August, 1848) disastrous tidings, rumours confused and contradictory, but all of sinister bodement, were daily coming in. I noticed that Abbot Quarantelli seemed rather pleased than otherwise when news reached the monastery of reverses having befallen the royal army. He had no faith in Carlo Alberto, and unbounded confidence in the Italian people to free Italy, unassisted, from the Alps to the Adriatic. A man may be the best of human beings and a very short-sighted politician. Patrols, a certain number of men, employed to quietly note, for the information of the Government, who the pilgrims to the sacred shrine were—hence the adoption of disguises—told me one day that the King had been totally defeated, and Milan surrendered by Carlo Alberto to the Austrians. I repeated the rumour to the abbot, who was reading the only

newspaper he ever looked at—the *Italia del Popolo*. His face flushed, and striking the table with his hand, he said, in a broken voice. ‘It was foreseen; has been foretold.’ Then making the sign of the cross, his lips moved in silent prayer—a prayer it required no words to tell was for his beloved Italy. Quarantelli was a native of Milan.

It was time, my errand being fulfilled, that I should be on my way back to Turin. There would not be the slightest difficulty; and I should have set forth the day after the second political conference—there were two held on consecutive evenings—but for a curious whim that had found a lodgment in my restless inquisitive brain.

Amongst the pilgrims was a man whose name I did not hear, but whose aspect and accent denoted him to be a native of southern or central not northern Italy, though he had, I knew, told the sacristan that he had been born and bred in a village about a league distant from Turin. He walked, hobbled rather, upon two crutches; and was come to be made straight again by the wonder-working power of the holy shrine and the sacred relics. No one was more constant and zealous in his devotions; and so earnestly did he entreat to be allowed to remain after his Novena (a series of prayers for nine days) and go through with a second, that the request, though an unusual one, was granted. There was something

rather prepossessing in the man's aspect, not certainly the least tinge of the bandit about it, yet I could not get it out of my head that he had some sinister design in view, and that his aim was levelled at the good abbot. I noticed several trifling matters which almost convinced me he was an impostor as to the lameness he was so piteously anxious to get cured of, but that was no affair of mine. What induced me to watch him closely, were the frequent furtive glances which he directed towards the abbot. The expression of those glances I could not in the least degree interpret. It was not an expression of hatred, or of malevolence. Very far, indeed, from that. It was a placid, rejoicing, self-gratulating expression—yet unmistakably sinister. What diabolical design against the peace or life of the venerable abbot was hatching in the fellow's brain? That I determined, if possible, to find out.

I had observed that almost every evening he went out, and stumped along in a particular direction—never once deviating into any other path—as if he were bound upon some definite errand. There were inhabitants dwelling wide apart, in a sweet valley, not far from the monastery; but this man had voluntarily informed the sacristan, with whom he was very excellent friends, that he did not know a soul there. Why, then, did he invariably take the path which led to that valley?

I would turn that stone and see what was under it at all events.

I was well beforehand with the lame penitent, and well concealed. He came at about his usual time, stumping vigorously, passed where I lay concealed, and presently turned off into a by-path, which I knew—for, since my arrival at the monastery, I had been strolling about nearly every day enjoying the glorious scenery, especially at sunrise. My pace was not rapid, from the tenderness of my feet; but I had managed to get over a great deal of ground. Why, except to meet some one by clandestine appointment, could the pious cripple be taking his evening walk, and at such a vigorous pace, too, in that direction? I would know, though baffled for that evening, the path that he had taken being such that I could not follow without being observed, nor could I double upon him.

I returned to the monastery, and hung about the gate till he returned, just, as was his practice, before it was about to close. He looked flushed, excited, and tired, but did not for that omit his pious practice of offering up his evening orisons before the holy shrine.)

The next evening I again preceded him, and had gained a point of vantage, if he came the same way as on the previous evening, whence I could not fail to discover what was his object in visiting, every evening, that solitary secluded

place. My friend soon made his appearance, and directly he had turned a sharp elbow in the path, and there was no possibility of his being observed—except by some one *purposely* lying in wait—off went the crutches, and a tall well-formed man was before me, who, after stretching his cramped legs, put a whistle to his mouth, sounding it in a peculiar manner. It was replied to in the same manner, and presently the figure of a man appeared on one of the opposite ridges, whence he descended like one perfectly familiar with the place, into the intervening vale or hollow. The restored cripple advanced briskly to meet him, and both conversed earnestly together for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. They were very merry. Their laughter, though not loud, could be distinctly heard in that silent place. Matters were going, or bade fair to go, smoothly with them. Their gesticulations, too, were of the liveliest, most demonstrative kind, even for Italians. They certainly had some very pleasant game afoot. I was thoroughly convinced that devilry of some sort or other, in which the abbot was concerned, was in hand. I crept as close to them as prudence permitted; but though my hearing was naturally acute, and I strained it to the utmost, I could only distinctly make out the name of Radetsky, the Austrian general, and Carlo Alberto; mention of the King being invariably followed by a burst of merriment. Once I thought I heard the new-

comer pronounce the abbot's name, but of that I was not sure. They parted hastily; the pilgrim appearing to suddenly remember he had not more than sufficient time to reach the monastery before the gate would be closed. I knew a shorter way, and should be there some time before him.

They were distant from each other about a dozen yards, when the pilgrim stopped short, and turning round, called to his companion, 'Don't forget to have the mules in readiness.' The other nodded his head, and both continued on their way. The pilgrim strapped up his legs, resumed his crutches, and stumped off vigorously as he came.

The sly scoundrel's evening orisons were gone through with as much oily unction as ever. I suppose he recited the prayers; his lips moved as if he did. As he stumped past me on the way to his cell, his hypocritical smile was, I thought—but that might be fancy—even more than usually suave and reverential. 'Ha, ha!' I mentally chuckled, 'did you, my pious pilgrim, know that the tonsured friar was one of the Turin Officers of Public Safety, and had been dogging your steps during the last two or three hours, that countenance of yours would scarcely be constrained into such sweet smiles at sight of him,'—if, indeed, he or any of the veritable brotherhood could have been edified by again looking upon such a shining example of fervent devotion and child-like faith.

The question—a pressing one—now arose, as to what should be done. That an iniquitous plot of some kind was in progress could not be doubted; but against whom was it directed? what might be its purpose? what the means devised for carrying it to a successful issue? I had nothing to guide me to a probable solution except the few words I had overheard in the valley,—‘Quarantelli, Radetsky, Carlo Alberto,’—and that three swift mules would be required. Dim guidance, but which *might* light me to a clue. I embraced the task with alacrity. The Italian intellect, from the highest to the lowest grade, especially delights in groping amidst obscure mysteries, without much reference to the importance of the inquiry, or great anxiety as to the particular result. It must have been this national characteristic which induced me, a sailor youth, heartily to embrace a vocation for which my early life would seem to have totally unfitted me. We pride ourselves upon subtlety in action, and admire that quality in others. Machiavelli’s was a true type of the Italian mind. In Shakespeare’s play of *Othello*, which I have seen many times acted in Italy, it is always Iago who wins the applause and carries the audience with him. Othello is, indeed, commiserated, contemptuously commiserated. He is a silly dupe, Iago the subtle victor. This sentiment owes, if not its origin, much of its force and intensity to the leaden tyranny to which Italians

have been subjected for centuries, when by subtlety alone could they hope to cope with the strong-handed oppressor.

Yes, I entered with gusto upon the task of baffling the plot, whatever it might be, but which certainly had no insignificant aim. 'Quarantelli, Radetsky, Carlo Alberto!' I kept repeating to myself, as I lay sleepless upon my pallet. What possible connection could the name of the good and liberal abbot have with that of the brutal Austrian field-marshal, or with Carlo Alberto's? I knew Quarantelli was from Milan, had heard vague rumours of his having been obliged to take refuge in Piedmont, he having in some way deeply compromised himself with the Austrian Government. Milan, we knew, had been retaken and occupied by Radetsky's army, that of Carlo Alberto being in full flight upon Turin. Was it an object with the Austrian authorities to get Quarantelli into their power? He had been, some one told me, condemned to death by the tribunal at Milan in his absence, having failed to appear when formally cited. If that were true, the riddle was read. Quarantelli was to be quietly kidnapped. The agents selected were the cripple impostor, and the brother rascal whom he met in the evening by appointment. That theory took in the three swift mules! True; but how could two ruffians, reckless, audacious as they might be hope to seize the abbot and carry him off success-

fully? He never, that I knew of, left his monastery, except when he went to Turin, and then always accompanied by three or four of the brethren. Besides, the mounted patrols along the road would effectually defeat such an attempt, and drag the perpetrators to condign punishment. Should I inform the abbot of what I had seen and heard? His fate would then be in his own hands. So warned, he could easily of himself baffle any plot that might be forming against him.

Undoubtedly, that would have been the safe course to pursue, but I had one strong objection to it. The part I had been playing in the monastery had wounded my self-esteem. Gloze it over as I might, I had made a scandalous requital of the abbot's fatherly kindness. Now, if by my own unassisted efforts I could save the excellent man from a great peril, I should recover my self-respect. I determined to watch the cripple conspirator closely during the day, and when he set off for his usual evening ramble, contrive to reach the place of rendezvous by the short cut I have spoken of, before him; and find some hiding-place whence I could hear with some distinctness the conversation of the two worthies.

There was a serpent glitter in the impostor's eyes the next day which made me very uncomfortable. It seemed that he already clutched the prize in view, whatever it might be. This exulting look and manner of his particularly struck me

when the abbot was reciting the prayers for the dying, in which he, in a very sad and solemn manner, requested all in the church to join. Pietro Bertani, he said, to whom they knew he himself was under a great obligation, and who had been for some time stricken with mortal illness, was now at the point of death. His soul, there was no doubt, would have winged its flight to eternity before another sunrise dawned upon the earth.

‘Who is Pietro Bertani?’ I asked of one of the monks.

• ‘A shepherd whose dwelling is not far from here,’ was the reply. ‘He saved the abbot’s life about six months ago, when he was attacked by two assassins. Since then his reverence has never left the monastery alone, except to visit poor Bertani, who received the wound of which he is now dying in his conflict with the assassins.’

I must have been strangely obtuse that day, the monk’s reply suggesting to my mind no connection between the fast approaching death of Bertani and the exultant satisfaction of the sham cripple. Even the remark that the abbot never of late had left the monastery alone, *except* to visit Bertani, had no significance for me. ‘Bertani’s death, then,’ thought I, dull-brained ass that I must have been, ‘can have nothing to do with that scoundrel’s manifest exultation.’

‘If that had been my normal state of mind I ought to have been condemned, like Nebuchad-

nezzar, to browse upon grass and thistles. Bertani, the preserver of Quarantelli's life, had but a few hours to live, and what could be more certain than that the abbot would be with him, alone with him, during his agony?

I took care, however, not to lose sight of the impostor. He, usually so tranquil, absorbed in pious meditation, was strangely restless, could not remain in one place more than a few minutes together. I observed also that he was annoyed at finding that, shift as he would, he could not avoid me. If he hid himself for a while in his cell he was safe to find, when he came out, Brother Saffi at a little distance outside. This annoyed, alarmed him. 'Does this Carmelite spy suspect anything?' he must have repeatedly asked himself.

One hour at least before his usual time my nervous friend started off upon his evening ramble. Though taken somewhat by surprise, I hastened after him without loss of a moment. I should gain at least ten minutes upon him; plenty of time to conceal myself. It so proved, and I was snugly hidden beneath a thick Alpine bush, where I could see without being seen, and I trusted I should hear too.

Ah, here comes my pious pilgrim. Off go the crutches. He flings them away, too, as if he should not require them again. One he has whirled up into the air. Was the decisive hour

about to strike? Was the plot ripe for immediate execution? In a breath-suspending moment the truth flashed upon me. Bertani's mortal illness was known to them. The abbot, they were sure, would attend him in his last moments—would be alone with him, as the practice of the Church invariably is when a priest administers its last offices. Bertani's dwelling, I had heard, was in a valley no great distance off, and solitary as that where the conspirators met. Only an old woman nurse was with the dying man. The whole scheme was patent to dullest eyes; and I—blind deaf dolt that I was—had not provided myself with a weapon of any kind. It would be impossible to summon assistance, except for pursuit; and how overtake three swift mules in the sinuous diverging passes of the Apennines, with darkness coming on? My heart sank within me, and I bitterly condemned myself for having preferred the gratification of a morbid self-love to the safety of the good abbot. True, the abductors were, I believed, but two—and even on that point I might be mistaken, notwithstanding only three mules were to be provided; but if not, the abbot and I would be no match for the two powerful ruffians we should have to deal with. Both, there could be not a doubt, were armed with stiletos, the most terrible of weapons in a close encounter. The abbot, moreover, was growing old, and comparatively feeble. We should not have a chance. Still, courage!

The uncrutched cripple is apparently almost as uneasy and anxious as myself. Thrice he has whistled ; and there is no response. ‘Diavolo !’ I can hear him savagely mutter with irrepressible impatience. ‘Diavolo ! should Gaetano be late, we may miss the prize after all. Malediction ! just, too, as it is within my grasp !’ He whistled thrice again. There was no answering sound, and the fellow stamped and gesticulated with rage and vexation. ‘The abbot may be gone before we reach Bertani’s hut. If he is, our last card has been played and we have lost ; for never will I again trust myself in the monastery. That Carmelite monk suspects me. I wonder if he is really a monk ; I have more than once doubted it. His black piercing eyes are never off me. Yet what can he know or suspect ? It is growing dark. Will Gaetano never come ? Again the miscreant whistled in his peculiar manner. This time there was a response. The pilgrim paused in his hasty striding to and fro, and clapped his hands for joy.

Two or three minutes passed, and Gaetano made his appearance, leading three fine mules. A few words only were exchanged between the two ruffians ; each sprang upon the back of a mule, and leading the third, set off at a smart pace, turning down a narrow pass which led to the valley where stood Bertani’s solitary hut.

I lost no time in scrambling out from under

the Alpine bush, which was as difficult to get out of as to enter. I did not for a moment hesitate to follow the villains, weaponless though I was. Something might occur to give me a chance of rescuing the venerable man. As I hurried on, my foot struck against one of the pilgrim's crutches, the one which, in his exuberant triumph, he had whirled into the air, and to a considerable distance from him. I seized it eagerly. It was light, but strong, and tipped with iron—a most formidable weapon, against which, wielded by a strong and willing arm, stilettos would be of no avail. I laughed aloud, and firmly grasping the crutch resumed the chase at a run.

Before forcing myself into the bush, I had tucked up my monk's frock, so that I made pretty swift progress, my only fear being that I should perhaps take a wrong turning. I stopped more than once to catch, if I could, the sound of the mules' feet. I could hear nothing. It was not likely that I should. On I went, trusting in good-fortune, luck, what you will, for more, I judged, than a quarter of an hour, and was becoming every moment more and more persuaded that I had missed the way, when, turning a sharp angle, and fairly out of breath, I came suddenly upon the three mules tethered securely together. I whirled my iron-pointed staff round my head with joy, and had some difficulty in suppressing a fierce shout which sprang as it were to my lips.

Nothing could have happened better. I could conceal myself close by the mules, behind a projecting spur of rock, recover my breath, and pounce upon the rascals when they least expected or were prepared for it. The odds, which seemed so much against me, were now clearly on my side.

In two or three minutes I heard steps approaching, and mocking menacing voices. I tucked my friar's sleeve up, and was quite ready. The steps, the voices, came rapidly nearer.

'Patience, your reverence,' I heard the pilgrim ruffian say. 'Patience is an apostolic virtue; and per Bacco! it is not of the slightest use to be angry.'

Some reply was made by the abbot, but in so low a tone that I could not distinguish the words.

'The cords which bind your eccellenza's hands,' replied the first ruffian, 'shall be loosened if they hurt you, when we have time to attend to it. Just now there is not a moment to be lost. We have undertaken to deliver you into the hands of the authorities at Milan, and we'll do it! Gently, if you are gentle; roughly, if you are rough. And remember, reverendissimo, that at any attempt on your part to claim assistance, I will bury six inches of stiletto steel in your reverend heart. Here are the mules. Gaetano, assist the good abbot to mount the middle one, whilst I unfasten the beasts.'

To do that, the fellow had to kneel down on one knee, the end of the tethering cord being fastened round a pine-stump. The knot had been securely tied. His hat fell off. Gaetano's back was towards me. It was a delicious moment, the enjoyment of which I would fain have prolonged.

One whirl of the iron-tipped staff round my head, to give it full swing, and it descended upon the villain's uncovered skull with the effect, if not the force, of a thunderbolt. He uttered no cry, and fell quite senseless upon the ground. Gaetano turned sharply round, and instinctively his hand sought for his stiletto. He was not quick enough. A sharp swift blow on the arm paralysed it; the dagger dropped from his grasp. He might, however, escape, and he turned with a horrible curse to flee. I was determined that he should not escape, and to effectually prevent him doing so, struck him a stunning blow on the back of his head. His career, like that of his companion, was finished—for some time, at all events.

All this passed in much less time than it will take any one to read the account, and I was releasing the pinioned arms of the abbot before he himself could distinctly realise what had happened. Possibly he for a moment imagined it was an avenging angel, in the garb of a monk, sent specially to execute vengeance upon the sacrilegious scoundrels. If that were so, his vision

soon cleared, as he recognised his overjoyed deliverer.

‘Saffi, my friend, my brother!’ he exclaimed, in a broken, almost sobbing voice. ‘Is it to you that I owe my deliverance from bonds and death?’

‘The easiest service ever rendered, reverendissimo, and one that a thousand times over repays itself.’

‘Were you here by accident?’ he asked.

‘No, not by accident; I will tell your reverence all, by and by. I have been blamable, too rash, self-confident, and should have had to contend without a weapon with these two villains, had I not stumbled upon this crutch. But it will be well, as night is fast coming on, to gain the monastery as quickly as possible. I must fasten these two breathing logs upon the back of one of the mules, which must carry double.’

There is always a running stream at hand in the Apennines, and a few douches in the face and on the head sufficed to revive in Gaetano a confused consciousness. Him I got upon a mule’s back without much difficulty; the other no quantity of douching could bring back, for the time, to life. I placed my hand upon his heart; he breathed, had not been killed outright. I was slightly pleased that it was so. At last, however, I got him astride the mule, behind his fellow-ruffian; and having lashed their legs securely under the animal, we went on our way.

The abbot was silent, reflective. I broke the silence by asking in a low tone after Pietro Bertani. The abbot crossed himself, and said solemnly,

‘He is gone. I have received his last breath, and was leaving the place when I was seized upon by these baffled villains.’

I asked if he knew *why* a plot to seize him* should have been set on foot.’

‘O, yes,’ he said. ‘It is thought that, if I could be once securely lodged in a Milan gaol, I should, to obtain my freedom, have disclosed certain important secrets of which the Austrian authorities believe I am in possession. They would have found themselves mistaken. There is no doubt,’ he added, with a smile and a peculiar intonation, ‘that but for the opportune interposition of a Carmelite friend I should have passed the remainder of my days in an Austrian dungeon. The Tedeschi attach far too much importance to the abbot Quarantelli. All had been arranged, rely upon it, and once beyond the passes of the Apennines my transmittance to Milan would have been swiftly and securely effected.’

No more was said till we reached the gate of the monastery, which hive of holy men was thrown into a state of terrible excitement when they confusedly understood that, but for Brother Saffi their venerable abbot would have been carried off if not murdered. And how they buzzed and

hummed about the malefactors! As for the sacristan, with whom the pious pilgrim had been so great a favourite, I am sure it must have been a considerable time before he believed the evidence of his own eyes and ears.

As I was bidding the abbot good-night at the entrance to the dormitory, he said, with a smile of mingled rebuke and gratitude,

‘Are you really a Carmelite friar?’

I said he should know all in the morning, and hurried away.

I then sought the physician to the monastery to ascertain if the two prisoners could, with safety to their lives, set out on the morrow to Turin. They had been stunned; nothing more serious than that. The effect of the wound in the head, which I had inflicted upon the pretended cripple, had been greatly mitigated by a copious effusion of blood at the time.

I had a long interview with the abbot the next morning. We parted excellent friends, and shortly afterwards I was on my way to the sub-Alpine capital with the two prisoners—whose papers I had of course taken care to secure—in my charge. I lodged them in prison, and made a formal report to M. Pinelli, who was pleased to express himself perfectly satisfied with the manner in which I had carried out his instructions. The papers found upon Gaetano and his brother villain were of course handed over to him. A rigorous investiga-

tion into all the circumstances of the case should, he said, be at once instituted. I ventured a hint that the workman was worthy of his hire, and that he gives twice who gives quickly.

‘O, the reward!’ said the chief. ‘Certainly you have fully entitled yourself to it; but the Government offices are in such a state of confusion—revolution—just now, on account of the reverses which have befallen our army and the approach of the Austrians, that nothing can be done for the present. You will have no cause to complain in the end. We shall soon be all right again, I hope and believe. Good-day! Let me see you again to-morrow.’

I never heard what became of the two prisoners.

CHAPTER V.

CONSPIRATORS IN MILAN.

THE Republican insurrection in Genoa, which broke out immediately after the accession of Victor Emmanuel, had been promptly put down, though not without much bloodshed, by General Marmora and forty thousand Piedmontese soldiers; but the leading spirits of the revolt, the chiefs of the Movimento party, were far as ever from holding themselves as permanently vanquished by a temporary defeat, which but served to exasperate their hatred of monarchy, and of Victor Emmanuel, its symbol and personification. Such of them whose names had acquired a European reputation, and were therefore peculiarly obnoxious to the ruling powers, sought refuge in England, where alone, with the exception of the United States of America, they would be really, defiantly, secure. I may here remark that, so far as my observation has gone, the consciousness that, at but a short distance, reckoned by time, thanks to railway and steam, the political enthusiast, whatever be the pattern of his politics—Republican, Monarchical, or Legitimist—is always sure of safety in England is never absent from the minds of the bold ardent

men who, with arms in their hands, strive to work out the regeneration of their country in accordance with their own pet theories. There is in the hour of defeat England to flee to. No monarchical amenities addressed by one despot to another could, under cover of any pretended legal fiction or subterfuge, enable authority to drag one from that asylum. Courage, then. If we fail, there is always England. A proud boast that for Englishmen, knowing as they do that the haughty vaunt is not an empty glorification, but a solid truth.

The minor actors in the Italian Republican drama, the first act of which had closed in ~~disaster~~ and defeat, dispersed themselves throughout Italy. To the uninitiated they would have appeared to be disorganised—purposeless; each one for himself making an escape from immediate and pressing danger. This was very far from being the case. The itinerary of every dependable man had been clearly traced for him, where he was to find himself on given days. He was instructed how to recognise friends ‘to the great cause,’ with whom to associate, and how he might most effectively help forward what those enthusiasts—sincere enthusiasts, as I believe, speaking of them as a body—believed to be the redemption of their country.

There was, however, one danger against which the astutest chiefs, organisers of secret societies, can never effectually guard—the treason of some of the members. A Government with ample funds

at command, wherewith to reward and enrich informers, will never lack them, terrible as may be the threats of vengeance fulminated by the society against traitors.

The Turin Government was consequently soon in possession of important information concerning the designs of the Movimento party, that the nuclei of several secret societies had been formed in Milan; yet so artistic was the constitution of these societies, that with all the goodwill in the world the traitors could only disclose restricted fragmentary parts of the grand design, and the machinery by which it was hoped a successful result would be obtained. At first view it struck one as extraordinary that Milan, the capital of Lombardy, ruthlessly governed by Austrian military law, should be chosen as the focus of such conspiracies against established rule. A closer consideration diminished, in fact effaced, the first feeling of surprise. The Milanese were to a man, woman, one might almost say child, the bitter deadly foes of their Austrian tyrants, and as a corollary were fast friends of those—no matter under what banner they were ranged—to whom Austria was an enemy. Nowhere could the conspirators be so really safe as in the city where the brutal Pandour and the Croat controlled indeed the exterior life of the citizens, but were powerless to influence the inner workings of the Italian heart.

There is one remarkable fact, to the literal truth of which I can testify. I speak of course only of my own limited experience. I do not believe that one Italian member of a secret society—and with the exception of a small number of Frenchmen, Poles, and Hungarians, who were as staunch as steel, they were all Italians—revealed the secrets confided to their loyalty to the Austrian. I do not remember one instance to the contrary, though I must admit that such treasons may have been committed, of which in my limited sphere I could not be cognisant. I doubt that it was so. The Italian hates the Tedeschi with a passionate hatred which colder natures can neither understand nor excuse. That feeling has been the product of centuries of savage oppression.

The Piedmontese Government—whatever its faults, crimes, or shortcomings—was at all events not Austrian. Besides, did not King Victor Emmanuel proclaim, as loudly as he dared, that l'Unita Italia was his goal as truly as it was that of the Republicans, though he sought to reach it by a different road? It was also certain that the monarch of Piedmont did not seek to punish the Italians for conspiring to achieve the liberation of their country from foreign rule. He and his councillors only desired to be privately informed of the numbers, names, and plans of the secret societies; so that if his own authority were seriously menaced, he might be able to take effective

measures to guard against the storm. It was, I know, by some such reasoning as this that the traitors—as they really were, having been sworn to fidelity and secrecy—salved their consciences.

I was one of those selected by the Minister of the Interior—upon the recommendation of Signor Pinelli—to verify, by actual observation, the reports which had been furnished to the Government. We were in all eight. This I knew not at the time, believing, as I did, that the safety of the State, so far as it might be menaced by the secret societies, was entrusted to my patriotic zeal and cleverness. The same delusion was no doubt entertained by every one of the eight. Personally, not one knew the other. The reports we should make would be compared, and an accurate elimination of the real facts, stripped of all exaggeration, would no doubt be the result.

At my last interview with the chief, before departing upon what all concerned knew to be a very dangerous errand, he handed me a carefully drawn up document, in which instructions for my guidance in every conceivable contingency were minutely set forth. I was told to study well that paper before setting out; so that I might, in a substantive sense, know it by heart. One of the most important divisions in the document was the *liste raisonnée* of the chief persons, male and female, with whom I should probably come into contact.

‘Such a thorough study of that list as will engrave it on your memory,’ said Signor Pinelli, ‘will prove of invaluable service—the Ariadne’s clue which may guide you to safety from out the windings of an else fatal labyrinth. You will there find the name of the celebrated Countess Gloriosa [Gloriosa, I need hardly say, is the name with which I rechristen her in these pages; the original is well known in Italy]. Be very observant of, and, in appearance, subservient to, the Countess Gloriosa. She is a fanatic for l’Unita Italia; but, chiefly on account of relationship—rather distant relations—to the Royal House of Savoy, she would move heaven and earth to place the crown of United Italy upon the brow of Victor Emmanuel. She is a most valuable ally, but one who must be watched as well as worshipped by our agents. There are other ladies in the same category. You must make yourself especially agreeable to them. That will not be difficult. You are a presentable fellow enough now that you have got rid of that vulgar sailor swing, and your cruelly cropped locks are reacquiring their former luxuriance. You speak French, too, surprisingly well—an accomplishment which has decided my choice of your masquerade dress. It will be that of a French Capitaine de Dragons, and you will personate Capitaine de Jomière, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour.’

‘How, Signor Pinelli, a man so well known

as Capitaine de Jomières! 'detection would be inevitable! Signor, you are, I think, unwittingly consigning me to destruction.'

'I have before told you, my dear Giuseppe, that you jump too hastily at conclusions; it is the greatest defect in your character. The very audacity of the assumption will almost ensure impunity. Captain de Jomières is *not* well known personally. He only returned from Algeria, after seven years' absence, about three weeks since. His regiment now forms part of the garrison of Paris. You have seen his name mentioned in our democratic journals as a supposed secret agent of the French Government; his sympathies being well known to be with Italy, one grand reason being that his mother was an Italian woman. It is fortunate that he has that reputation.'

'Saints and angels, Signor, how you talk! Why, he will be the first to denounce me as an impostor. He will quickly know, through his friends in the secret societies—for there can be no question that he has numerous friends in the ranks of the conspirators, though they may not know him by sight—that some one was passing himself off as Captain de Jomières, and my affair would be settled.'

'Again, my dear Giuseppe'—[To the devil with 'dear!' I muttered under my breath, feeling, as I did, really alarmed]—'Again, my dear Giuseppe, indulging in your inveterate habit of

passing from a false basis to false conclusions. Captain de Jomière is with us—with the King's Government I of course mean—body and soul, and that too for weighty reasons, apart from natural inclination.'

'Then why, *corpo di Bacco*, not employ the real captain, instead of a clumsy counterfeit, in this perilous enterprise you have been kind enough to devolve upon me?'

'That was precisely our intention. An accident to Captain de Jomière has obliged us to substitute you for him. He was thrown from his horse the day before yesterday, and so injured that he will not be fit for active service for some months to come.'

'I saw a report, now I call it to mind, on the morning of the accident; but it was added that the hurt was of no consequence; and that Captain de Jomière would have quite recovered from it in two or three days at the utmost.'

'Yes, I wrote that paragraph by superior order. Captain de Jomière has already written to several of his friends in Milan—friends, understand, because they know him to be a stanch advocate of *l'Unità Italia* and a trusted agent of the French Government. Personally not one of them would know him from me or you. Jomière will aid you to the utmost extent of his power. You must see and converse with him. He will place in your hands the whole of his correspondence with the confederates, and acquaint you with many par-

ticulars which will entirely preclude the suspicion that you are not the veritable De Jomière, Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, and Capitaine of the Third Dragoons. Whilst you are absent on your mission de Jomière will keep close. Not more than five persons, including the King, the court physician, and myself, will know that he is in Turin. With such precautions detection would seem to be impossible; and, upon my word, Giuseppe, you are not unlike the Chevalier, now I come to look at you. He is older than you in years, but not in appearance; and his complexion, darkened by the sun of Africa, is swarthy as yours. Well made up, you might pass for him with his own father, had he not seen his son for seven years. You are just the man, Giuseppe; there is no cause for hesitation.'

I knew the value of all that soothing syrup; but what could I do? I was enlisted in the service, and my first duty was obedience—a necessity, moreover, as much as a duty. I must e'en take my chance.

Nearly a week passed, before I was held to be sufficiently crammed with instructions to be able to play the part assigned me with a chance of success. Captain de Jomière was a man of jocund merry humour, and though suffering severely from a compound fracture of the bone of the right thigh, there was a laughing devil in his eye, as he bade me adieu, which gave me a hot disagreeable qualm.

‘Adieu, Chevalier de Jomières,’ said he; ‘adieu, my worthy *alter ego*, my other and much better self. I sincerely hope no harm will befall you; but I cannot conceal from myself that our friends’ eyes are as sharp as their daggers. Do not fly off in that fashion, my dear De Jomières. *Sacré bleu!* is it not always best and safest to look danger fully and boldly in the face? I have more to say. Supposing, now, that you are detected, and at the time of detection are helplessly in our friends’ power—which unpleasant *contretemps* is, it cannot but be admitted, upon the cards—you will be sentenced to death by acclamation, and the sentence will be executed without delay. I have therefore to request, as an act of friendship, that, finding your passport peremptorily made out for the other world, you will frankly confess not only that you are not the real De Jomières, but that the papers found upon you were surreptitiously obtained from him, and that he at that moment was in profound ignorance of your having dared to personate so devoted an adherent to the national cause. This, my dear Giuseppe, will be an act of simple justice towards me, and will cost you nothing, nothing whatever. Now, my good friend, don’t look so savage, as if you could eat me without sauce. I am a man who always endeavours to requite a friend to the utmost of my power for a favour done me; and I now give you my word of honour, that if you at the last moment, when all hope

of life shall have fled, do me the simple act of justice I have indicated, I will have, and without delay, twelve—yes, twelve black masses said for the repose of your soul.’

‘Go to—to Paradise yourself, with your black masses, if you can! You may have a chance of being there before me yet. I heard the doctors say, only about an hour since, that symptoms of mortification were, they fancied, showing themselves in your thigh, and if so, you would go out like the snuff of a candle.’

A deadly pallor ‘overspread De Jomières’ features; the mocking smile on his lips and in his eyes lost its light, was extinguished.

‘You lie, scélérat!’ he gasped. ‘It is an invention; confess it is a lie!’

‘Ask the doctors if I lie; they will be here presently. Addio! One moment; I am a man who always endeavours, as you do, to requite a friend to the utmost of my power for any favour done me, and I now promise, not to pay for *twelve* black masses for the repose of your soul—I am not so rich as you—but for six I *will* pay for the Chevalier. Addio, capitaine. I much fear I shall never see you again. Life is but a lottery, my friend. We are all mortal, and a fatal number often turns up when least expected. Addio, again. I will not fail to remember so excellent a friend in my prayers.’

Ha, ha! He had a famous Roland for his

Oliver. I had as much right to scare him with a vision of a death's head as he had me. He, it is true, was in no real danger, whilst I—bah ! it is unwise to look down into the gulf whilst passing over it on a narrow shaking plank.

Arrived at the glorious city of Milan—glorious even in its moral eclipse—I, pursuant to my instructions, first presented myself at the residence of the Countess Gloriosa, on the Corso del Orientale. This lady, who had a splendid establishment, received me, after presenting my credentials, with much kindliness and grace ; talked charmingly of a hundred things ; of my campaign in Africa ; of Victor Emmanuel, his popularity with the Turinese ; of the transition government, as she believed it to be, installed at Paris ; and expressed a confident opinion, which she was sure was secretly mine also, that whenever a strong and really national government should be formed in France, that country would lend her powerful aid to Italy. She spoke in French in compliment to me. I answered in the same language, congratulating myself that her pronunciation was, to say the least, as defective as mine.

The countess was still beautiful, though time and other marring agencies had dimmed the brightness of her beauty. Her figure was superb ; as round, elastic, buoyant, in its graceful undulating movements as it could have been twenty

years previously. She would hold a *conversazione* on the following evening, to which she was graciously pleased to invite me. She would then introduce me to several influential friends engaged in the same holy cause as ourselves. The hot blood burned in my veins, flushed in my cheek, at having such words addressed to me—to me, a spy. Reflection mitigated that feeling, which was very much akin to shame. The countess herself, and the influential friends to whom I was to be introduced, were spies, honourable spies, it may be admitted; neither was I engaged in an enterprise which should call a blush into the face of an honest man, of a real lover, of Italy. Still concealment, disguise, pretending to be what you are not, does not conduce to self-respect.

I returned in somewhat irate mood to the Hôtel Maximilian, the proprietor of which, notwithstanding its having been named after an Austrian archduke, was an exalted Italian patriot, and for that reason was a marked man by the intrusive foreigner. I had no sooner seated myself in the private room I had engaged, than I was near to making a complete fiasco of the whole business, so far as I was concerned.

In burst, without knocking, four gaily-dressed young men, by whom, one after the other, I was violently embraced, and hailed with a shower of compliments, which with the embraces, bewildered, confounded me.

‘Bertrandi and Saluzzo,’ exclaimed one, in not very good French, ‘were absent from Milan at my country seat, a few miles out of the city, and did not, therefore, see your last letter till to-day, or they and my friend Babbio here would not have failed to have been the first to bid you welcome to Milan.’

‘Bertrandi—Saluzzo—Babbio!’ ejaculated I confusedly. I must have lost my head for the moment. ‘Who the devil is Bertrandi—Saluzzo—Babbio?’

‘Who!’ exclaimed he who had first spoken. ‘Does the Chevalier de Jomière—for surely you are the Chevalier de Jomière—ask that question?’

I saw the stupid blunder I had committed in a moment.

‘Ah, true, true, I remember now.’ I wrote to Signors Bertrandi, Saluzzo, and Babbio a few days since, announcing that I should be in Milan at a particular time. You will excuse me, Signors, but I have lately written so many letters to Italian friends that the unfamiliar names slip from my memory.’

The explanation was quite satisfactory. The young Signor Palestro, a rich and enthusiastic devotee of the Mazzinian creed, formularised by the words ‘God and the People,’ who had a charming villa on the borders of the Lago Maggiore, and who was evidently much looked up to by his three companions—live specimens, all of

them, of Giovine Italia—plunged at once into politics with great volubility and freedom. Lamartine and the French Government generally were fiercely abused for not having despatched an army to the aid of the heroic Milanese when they rose against the foreigner and drove Radetsky and his armed ruffians howling out of their noble city. Victor Emmanuel and his father came in for a yet more general abuse than even Lamartine. They were cowards, traitors, tools of the Austrians. Heavens ! if they could suddenly have discovered that I had Victor Emmanuel's money at that moment in my pocket, that I was even then working for his wages, I should assuredly have passed a very unpleasant quarter of an hour.

Signor Palestro and his friends, who did all the talking were, however, polite enough to express immense admiration of the great, the noble French nation, of whose sympathy for Italy they had no doubt the Chevalier de Jomière—himself an Italian on the maternal side, and of whom they had all heard—would prove a worthy exponent. Signor Palestro, moreover, professed sanguine faith in the Bonaparte, who would, he prophesied, become, and at no distant time, ruler of that France which he had been so long sounding with the sword of the great Napoleon. But, after all, Italy must and would work out in the main her own freedom, her own unity. The strong slave who hesitates to break his chains on

the oppressor's head deserves to die in them. Still, spite of his very exalted politics, Signor Palestro was evidently a shrewd observer of men and things. It behoved me, if I would ever see Turin again, that my mask should not for one moment slip aside whilst he was present.

The first avalanche of words being over, Signor Palestro invited me to visit him at his villa on the Lago Maggiore, on the day after the morrow. There was to be an extraordinary meeting of the chiefs of the Patriot Brotherhood held there on that day, to which he should be proud to introduce Capitaine de Jomières. I accepted the invitation with an inward shudder. How conveniently near would be found that magic lake, if it should be discovered that the pretended Chevalier de Jomières was really a spy of Victor Emmanuel! Short shrift, swift doom in that case.

I mentioned that I had called upon and seen the Countess Gloriosa, and was to be present at her conversazione on the following evening. At the mention of her name the countenances of the young men darkened, and they interchanged looks of, to me, strange meaning.

'Is her fidelity to the national cause doubted?' I asked.

'Yes,' replied Palestro, 'more than doubted up to a certain point. She is bound to that dissembling traitor Victor Emmanuel by family ties, and is consequently a monarchist. I do

not think she would prefer to see Italy remain under the oppression of the brutal Austrian, rather than a great republic including Piedmont. But the choice would be a sore trial for her. A man or woman who hesitates between kin and country is unfitted to take a part in the high heroic drama of the deliverance and regeneration of Italy! The countess is nevertheless a power which must be conciliated, nursed, held in real or affected esteem and admiration. The Austrian, that fragment of old rusty iron, Radetsky, believes she is doing his work, receiving, as she certainly does, his wages. He will find out by and by that she is fooling and laughing at him all the while. Ha,' concluded Palestro, with a flourish, 'when Italy lifts, by inherent strength, her noble star-wreathed head high among the nations of the earth, she will cast behind her the impure agencies of which she availed herself, to obtain her liberation from foreign rule—from brutalising thralldom.'

Soon after the delivery of this heroic burst the four compatriots left, Palestro having repeated his invitation to the Villa Felice, and warned me not to speak in the hotel, except privately with the proprietor, Vassi, that I was about to pay such a visit. I might do so without thinking of the danger that would be incurred, by asking the nearest way, or by what conveyance I could most easily reach the Signor Palestro's place. Vassi

would himself give me every requisite information. He was true as steel. I had been wisely directed to the Hôtel Maximilian.

A fortnight subsequently I knew, for I myself read the letter, that immediately after leaving me, that ardent, transcendental patriot, Signor Palestro, sat down and wrote to the Political Surveillance department of Turin, that he had seen and conversed with the Capitaine de Dragons Eugène de Jomière, and that he should keep a sharp look-out upon his movements, as would also the Countess Gloriosa. He, Palestro, had remarked a certain confusion of manner and speech, of which, however, he was very chary, especially for a Frenchman, which did not impress him favourably. The reader will now understand that Victor Emmanuel's government, with true Italian willingness, had so contrived that all their secret agents should be spies on each other. This tangled web was practically subjected to the control and guidance of Pinelli. The wheels within wheels revolved, stood still, revolved again, as he determined. In my humble opinion, Palestro could no more be justly called a traitor than myself. He might have had, no doubt, common sense enough to be convinced that, without the aid of the King of Piedmont, and such an alliance as he alone would be able to form, the deliverance of Italy would be a dream for at least many years to come.

I went early to the Countess Gloriosa's man-

sion in the Corso del Orientale the next evening, in accordance with a request to that effect, from the lady herself. She received me in her boudoir, no one but ourselves being present. The countess proceeded to 'business' at once.

'You have received an invitation from Signor Palestro,' she said, 'to visit him at his villa on the borders of Lago Maggiore. There will be a large assemblage there. Tell Palestro to be cautious. I may not see him myself previous to the time appointed. The Austrian authorities have obtained some hint of the intended meeting, through a traitor, of course: you, chevalier, a Frenchman, have nothing to fear, our brave Austrians scrupulously avoid meddling with Frenchmen, bitterly as they hate "*la grande nation*." But Palestro, who is somewhat reckless, must act with great circumspection, if only for the sake of his friends and of our holy cause. The traitor's name, tell him, is Giacomo Raffi. Palestro knew him very well. Raffi has left Milan, I fancy, for England, where he believes, no doubt, he will be safest, which is true. An endeavour will be made to introduce a Bolognese, named Mano, to the confederate fraternity. Raffi has furnished him with high-flown vouchers for his honesty—his enthusiasm for a United Italy. He is simply a paid agent of the Austrians. My advice is that he be received with seeming frankness—hospitably entertained. There may be half a dozen of

Palestro's friends present, yourself amongst the number; the conversation should be trivial, sparkling, as it is, usually, at the tables of insouciant Italians; and the result, if proper discretion be used, will be that Field-Marshal Radetsky will believe himself to have been plundered by Giacomo Raffi of a large sum of money under lying pretences; that the seditious réunions at the Villa Felice existed only in the inventive brains of Raffi. That impression produced will be itself a great gain. Can you, chevalier,' added the countess, 'remember all this—especially the names, Giacomo Raffi and Mano? It will be best not to write them. Persons leaving my house rather late in the evening have been frequently waylaid—knocked down—and have had their pockets rifled by Austrian sbirri in the guise of common robbers, with a view to the acquiring of any compromising papers they may have about them. It will be well for you, though a French officer, to carry no important papers about your person. Even I, a woman, take care never to do so.'

'I replied that, before leaving Turin, I had been cautioned in that respect; and that I took care scrupulously to follow the advice given me. I could not fail to remember the names Raffi and Mano, and the purport of the communication with which Madame la Comtesse had honoured me. It should be faithfully reported, at an early hour on the day fixed for the assemblage, to Signor Pales-

tro, who would no doubt govern himself by madame's wise counsel. With this ended our *tête-à-tête*, and we adjourned separately to the magnificent saloon, where the distinguished company, invited to assist at the *conversazione*, soon began to assemble.

A very brilliant, very diversified assembly, of which the Countess Gloriosa was the life, the grace, the soul. She had a beaming smile, a few honeyed words for all; markedly so for the two Austrian field-officers—mild, amiable-looking men, who had taken courage to present themselves at an Italian *réunion*. No one else, I observed, spoke with them, except three English gentlemen—tourists—to whom they were introduced by the countess. Notwithstanding the tact and vivacity of the Countess Gloriosa, a feeling of constraint, coldness, and reserve seemed to prevail amongst the great majority of the brilliantly-dressed throng. The *conversazione*, as such, was a ludicrous failure; and after a very short stay the guests willingly and rapidly took leave.

As I was leaving the countess whispered, 'Remember!' I bowed, and a minute afterwards was in the Corso.

I was early at the Villa Felice. Except servants, I saw no one but Signor Palestro himself. He welcomed me with effusion; but there was much of sadness in its warmth. Observing him more attentively, I saw that his eyes were suffused

with tears. I gently inquired the cause of his manifest grief. In reply, he handed me a newspaper, the *Italia del Popolo*, indicating with his finger a particular paragraph. It was a compressed report of a speech made by Odillon Barrot, President of the French Council of Ministers, announcing that General Oudinot would receive orders immediately to advance from Civita Vecchia upon Rome, and occupy the Eternal City in the interests of Liberty, and to secure the populace of Rome from foreign intervention, under the presence of which a counter-revolution might be got up. I read the paragraph aloud.

‘I am not at all surprised,’ I remarked; ‘but the inimical cynicism of M. Barrot might have been spared.’

‘That is true, chevalier. The sham French Republic is about to put down by force, and under hypocritical pretences, a real republic—established on the 9th of February last, without force, without violence, by the simple, honest will of the people—and which, though strong in its holy right, is powerless to resist the legions of France. It is terrible. Italy will, I fear, never be permitted to rise from her ashes, to be again the light, the regenerator, the moral mistress of the world. In a short time, Pius the Ninth, now at Gaeta, will be again enthroned at Rome, under the protection of French bayonets. Shame and disgrace, eternal shame and disgrace, to France,

that hers should be the mailed hand to strike down Italian liberty, where alone it has raised its glorious head in peaceful majesty.'

'As to eternal shame and disgrace to France,' said I, thinking it essential to sustain my rôle of Frenchman—not one of whom that I have ever seen can endure, however much he may rail against any particular ministry or régime, to hear *la grande nation* itself railed against or spoken of slightly—'as to eternal shame and disgrace to France, Signor Palestro, that I excuse as a mere phrase. Do not forget that peasant France, which mainly supplies the soldiers of France, has never been republican in heart, and is intensely Catholic.'

'I have long since recognised that truth, chevalier. Yes, it must be admitted that, in this Papal imbróglio, the French Government, however liberally inclined, will always have a difficult part to play.'

'That is very certain, signor. Permit me also to add that it might be as well to talk less of L'Unità Italia, and to set act, by treading out local and provincial jealousies, as to render the dream a reality. In that direction alone lies the salvation of Italy. The fable of the bundle of sticks is of universal application.'

'True—true; we have nothing to hope from the people of France in the Roman affair. Their spiritual guides will persuade them that to de-

prive the Pontiff of his temporal power is to abolish or weaken his spiritual dominion. Fools ! it would increase it a thousandfold, give it indestructible life by dissociating the immortal spirit from the corruption and decay by which it is enfeebled and obscured. But let us talk of other things. You have seen the Countess Gloriosa ?

‘Yes,’ said I, glancing round to make sure no one was within hearing ; ‘yes ; and I am the bearer of a message from her to you.’

‘A message from the countess to me ! Pray let me hear it.’

‘One Mano, whose honesty, zeal, and intelligence especially have been vouched for by Carlo Raffi, is expected shortly at the Villa Felice. You, signor, know for what purpose.’ I then repeated in full all I had been told concerning these worthies, and her advice as to the craftiest mode of mystifying Signor Mano. Palestro listened with anxious earnestness.

‘Ah,’ he said, when I had finished, ‘we, you and I, fish in very troubled, turbid waters. Still, if we conscientiously walk in the path of duty, whether that path conduct us to glory or a grave, we shall be acquitted to ourselves and by the Almighty. The Countess Gloriosa,’ he resumed, after a thoughtful pause, ‘is an extraordinary woman—a very extraordinary woman—a riddle—a sphinx. An invaluable friend—if she be a

reliable friend · a dangerous, fatal enemy, if to be an enemy were her game. I do not, cannot think it is, or will be. Notwithstanding certain misgivings, I believe in the chameleon countess.'

'I have spoken with her but twice, and I would pledge my life upon her faith.'

'Ah, you Frenchmen, many of you, are even more impulsive, impressionable, than us Italians.' But to return,' said Palestro, in a graver, more reflective tone, 'to the business immediately on hand, I have before had doubts concerning Raffi. When the Austrian rule was in undisputed ascendancy, he was, I discovered two or three days since, one of the Austrian police, in Milan. Fortunately, he is harmless—a serpent, but without poisonous fangs. I am glad, very glad, he has swindled old rusty-brained Radetsky. To speak the truth, M. le Chevalier de Jomière—a truth you will, before more than a very few hours have passed, clearly recognise—none of us—none of the affiliated neophytes, I mean—could betray the plans, or the mode or modes by which it is proposed to carry them out. Raffi simply knows, each of us knows, that he is a unit in a vast scientifically-organised body of men, whose one duty it is to hold themselves in readiness whenever the *mot d'ordre* shall come—and it may come at any moment, when we least expect it—to rise *en masse* for the liberation of Italy. We do not know from whom—though we have, of

course, our own opinion, convictions, if you will, upon the subject—the *mot d'ordre* will issue; nor in what place, what city—Paris, London, Milan—those master disposers of our fate sit and deliberate. A few, very few, are intrusted with the secret which will enable them to pronounce authoritatively upon the genuineness of the *mot d'ordre*, which may, as I have said, at any moment, summon us to immediate action. No, chevalier,' continued Signor P^lacet^{ro}, 'Raffi can have revealed nothing of importance. I myself could not. You, when you become illumined of us in the bond of brotherhood, as you further ^{sw} in spirit and purpose, will be able ^{asly} reveal nothing. Awaken suspicion? Yes. Alarm the powers that be, with vague intimations that they are slumbering upon a volcano, which may, from one hour to another, pour forth its fiery lava, and consume them utterly? True. But that would be all. If I were seized to-morrow, and taken before the Chief Quæstor and interrogated as to my complicity in, my knowledge of a confederacy formed to expel the foreigner from Italian soil, I could not, were I ever so willing, give authority the slightest clue to the unravelment of the plots by which they are menaced. Now, as to this Austrian spy, this Mano,' continued he, 'let us, adopting the Gloriosa's counsel as our guide, arrange how best to throw dust in his eyes, and in those of Radetsky.'

Palestro, myself, with about twenty others—who, generally one at a time, arrived at Felice—arranged the programme, disposed in the most effective manner—in a large artificially-darkened room—of sundry imposing paraphernalia, rehearsed our parts, and impatiently awaited the coming of Radetsky's envoy.

He did not keep us waiting long. Judging from appearances, he had been selected with judgment for the part assigned him. He was in the prime of life—agile, and double, vigorous in frame; and his restless, piercing black eyes indicated a man not easily hoodwinked—and one, moreover, whose mental glance could pierce through masks impervious to ordinary vision. The man's aspect was not a pleasant one. His features seemed to be cast in iron—bronze rather. Mano, if I judged him rightly, would, for a reward, execute remorselessly any task, what cruel deed soever, and contemplate, without one sense of pity, without the faintest emotion of regret, the consummation of his bloody work.

Mano's testimonials were examined with solemn scrutiny by three of the brethren, robed in long black dresses—somewhat resembling a priest's soutane—red scarves over their shoulders, and crimson-coloured Phrygian caps of liberty on their heads. I alone wore my French uniform of—Capitaine de Dragons. The testimonials being pronounced satisfactory, it was announced that

the two candidates present, craving admission into the ranks of 'the Italian Brotherhood,' whose high and sacred mission was the regeneration of their beloved country, would be at once initiated. Signor Mano and the Chevalier de Jomières, Frenchman by the accident of birth, but a true Italian patriot at heart, and Capitaine de Dragons in the army of France, were desired to rise and approach the pedestal in front of the president, upon which had been placed a solitary lamp, which shed its ineffectual rays over the gloomy room—ineffectual, that is, to illumine the whole extent of the apartment, at the further end of which shadowy forms glided noiselessly to and fro, adding considerably to the melodramatic effect of the scene.

Instantly that the name of the Chevalier de Jomières, Frenchman by birth, and Capitaine de Dragons in the armies of the French Republic, struck his ear, Signor Mano started with surprise, and darted at me a glance of eager scrutiny. Why should the pronouncing of my assumed name produce that significant though silent manifestation on his part? Was he, by some unfortunate chance, personally acquainted with the real De Jomières? I devoutly trusted that might not be the case; but the bare possibility that it might be gave me a terrible heartquake. My brother-neophyte saw the effect his look had produced upon me; and seeing an opportunity, afforded by some incident in the ceremonial, he whispered,

in Italian, 'Do not be alarmed. We are brothers. Will you promise, M. le Chevalier de Jomières, *to pay for twelve, or even six, masses for the repose of my soul*, if it should chance to be set free of its fleshly tabernacle by the daggers of our friends here?'

Saints and angels, what a turn the fellow's words gave me! I felt sick, faint—as if I should fall swooning to the floor.

'Courage, courage!' again the Austrian spy, as I found him to be, whispered; 'we are brothers, I tell you. We serve the same government. I have been authorised to say as much under certain circumstances. Hush! we are observed.'

'You seem to be old acquaintances,' remarked Palestro, in a peculiar tone.

'The Chevalier de Jomières has never, as he believes, spoken with me before,' replied Mano, with much nonchalance. 'I, however, recognised him. I served in the Foreign Legion, under the French flag, in Algeria, and had several opportunities of seeing and speaking a few words to the famous Capitaine du Troisième Régiment de Dragons. I am rejoiced to find he is to be one of us.'

This explanation appeared to dissipate whatever suspicion, or shadow of suspicion, Mano's familiar whispering in my ear might have excited. I hoped so. My new Italian friends were not homicidally inclined—very far from that, I was

quite sure ; but Southern blood flowed in their veins, and the mortified consciousness of having been egregiously duped by a spy in the service of the detested Victor Emmanuel would kindle that hot blood to fever-heat ; and I did not forget having been practically reminded that the Villa Felice was situate but a few paces from the Lago Maggiore, the deep waters of which had effectually hidden from mortal sight many ghastly secrets. There could be no doubt that Mano had seen and conversed at Turin with the real De Jomieres, and that that officer, for what sufficient motive I could not divine, had betrayed me. Surely the small retaliatory jest I had indulged in about the doctor's having been stated that ' his illness would, he feared, end fatally,' could not have been angrily remembered by such a man as general report gave out the Captain of the Third Regiment of French Dragoons to be. There was one thing quite clear : it would not do for me to offend Signor Mano. Nor would I trust him in the slightest degree. He might be the secret agent of half a dozen principalities and powers, and false to all. There were, I knew, many such in distracted Italy, gliding about, seeking whom they might devour. No ; I would be civil, extremely civil, to him, since we were ' brothers ;' but confide in Signor Mano ? No ; a hundred times no !

Whilst these thoughts were trooping through my palpitating brain, the ceremonial was proceed-

ing almost unheeded by me, though I had mechanically sworn upon a wooden crucifix never to divulge the secret of 'the Italian Brotherhood' about to be confided to me. That preliminary gone through, we were told to be seated; and Signor Palestro, opening a missal, read from it the Latin scripture text, 'Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terrâ pax' (Glory to God on high, and on earth peace), from which he preached a really excellent sermon.

'The Italian Brotherhood,' he explained, 'was an association of faithful Christian men, whose sole aim was to inculcate the holy maxims of peace and concord amongst all peoples, and primarily the peoples of Italy. They abjured war and violence of all kinds; the cannons and muskets of the soldier were held by the brotherhood in as much abhorrence as the dagger of the more vulgar assassin. Mischief would over haunt the violent man. That eternal truth had been written in tears and blood on the dark pages of Italian history. They did not plot themselves against princes, nor countenance the doing so by others. It was a deadly sin to rise in arms against a prince, however deservedly his subjects, yielding to the inspirations of their own unbridled will, might fancy him worthy of deposition—even of death; for even so far towards the abyss had some misguided, perhaps well-meaning, men gone. No! obedient to the proclamation of the divine text which he had read—"Glory to God on high,

and on earth peace"—the sacred duty of the Italian Brotherhood was scrupulously to obey, whilst they fervently prayed that God would incline the hearts of kings and princes unto wisdom. Only by the sedulous inculcation of the principles of peace and devout submission to the princes and governors, in accordance with the commands of the Supreme Ruler of the universe, could the true welfare of Italy be secured.'

There was much more in the same strain; and how the orator and his friends kept their countenances was a marvel. For myself, I had anticipated some amusement at watching the bewilderment and mystification of Mano, who would assuredly imagine, at hearing himself so addressed, that he had fallen in with a company of Moravians, Tremblers (Quakers), or lunatics. In fact, he did stare round at me several times with an expression of the most comical puzzlement; but I had no relish for fun—it had all been knocked out of me. I could not have got up a laugh at Sarco's *Leporello*. The confusion which I found it impossible to conceal was, I afterwards knew, attributed by Mano to the peace and passive-submission doctrines preached by Palestro, which so confounded him.

The lecture was the Alpha and Omega—the beginning and end—of the initiatory ceremonial. Signor Mano did not remain long. He felt that he had been made a fool of by that rascal Raffi;

and, pale, trembling with rage and mortification, he hastened off as speedily as possible.

‘Are you, Capitaine de Jomières; for Milan?’ he asked, as he passed me on going out.

The tone of voice was friendly; distrust of *me* did not gleam from his dark eyes. That was something. Nor had any doubt of the loyalty of the Chevalier de Jomières left a trace on the minds of Palestro and his friends. No real ‘secret society’ business was, however, gone into that day; so I left before dinner was served, in a state of extreme depression, for which I could not entirely account.

I could not throw it off. The trifling dinner I ordered at the Maximilian was sent away untasted. Wine—of which, contrary to my general habit, I drank freely—did not raise my spirits; and finally I determined to pass the evening at La Scala theatre. The opera was *Lucrezia Borgia*, a great favourite with me; but upon that occasion Donizetti’s delicious music, wonderfully rendered as it was, had no charm.

Gazing vacantly round the house, my eye caught and rested upon Signor Mano. He was alone in a central box, dressed in opera costume, and appeared to pay no more attention to the stage than I did. He did not seem to observe me, though I could not be sure of that—his restless piercing eyes, searching, as they did, every part of the house. At last a brilliant party

entered the ~~box~~, the chief personage amongst whom was ~~the~~ Countess Gloriosa. Signor Mano rose and bowed to the superb dame with exaggerated deference, which homage was, I thought, coldly enough received. The signor did not choose to accept the rebuff, such as it was, and persisted in occasionally forcing his conversation upon the countess; but seldom elicited, so far as I could judge, more than monosyllabic replies. It struck me, however, that the lady carefully avoided giving the intrusive plebeian serious offence. Such petty persecutions were, no doubt, part of the penalty she paid for her equivocal position.

The countess left with her party before the conclusion of the opera. Signor Mano lingered for awhile, during which his glance, or I was much mistaken, flashed recognisingly upon me, though I had put off my French uniform. When I looked again, a few minutes afterwards, he was gone.

I stayed out *Lucrezia Borgia*, and then sauntered slowly towards the hotel. I was met at the entrance by the landlord. He was waiting for me.

‘There is some one here waiting for you, Monsieur le Chevalier, with respect to whom you cannot be too strictly on your guard. He is a compound of rogue, traitor, and the devil to boot, and one of the most cunning rascals in Milan.

The fellow thinks I have forgotten him—that I do not recognise Bartolo Nosotti under the name of Signor Mano. He is deceived. I gave your friend Palestro a hint several days ago. Again I say beware! He may prove dangerous even to a French officer.'

The landlord's warning in itself would not have surprised me; but his words implied that Mano had been longer in Milan than myself. How, then, could it be that he could have seen and conversed at Turin with the Chevalier de Jomnières? Yet he must have done so! An invisible, but not for that the less real, web seemed to be fast closing round me. I hastened up the stairs to my apartment.

There, sure enough, sat quite at home and at his ease, Signor Mano, smoking a perfumed cigarette.

'Ah, camarade!' said he, extending his fingers, profusely covered with showy rings, 'I have been impatiently expecting you. Was I mistaken in fancying I saw you in the pit at La Scala?'

'I was in the pit, Signor Mano; and you may, of course, have seen me there.'

'I thought I could not have been mistaken. And now, if you are so inclined, Signor— Let me see; what is your name—your real name I mean, of course?'

The question afforded a tolerable chance of discovering if he really did know all about me,

and my errand in Milan; so I replied at once, without pause or hesitation,

‘Alberto Mariano. Surely De Jomières must have told you my name, amidst his other confidences.’

‘Ah, yes! Alberto Mariano. I remember now. But you are mistaken in one particular: I never saw or spoke to the Chevalier de Jomières in my life. It is true that I served for some time in the Foreign Legion stationed in Algeria, but I never saw the dashing Capitaine de Dragons.’

‘May I ask, then, not only how you knew at a glance I was not De Jomières, but of whom you heard some trifling remarks concerning masses for the repose of souls which certainly passed between the disabled officer and myself?’

‘That is easily explained. The physician who attended him is one of us—not meaning the fools and knaves we met to-day, nor indeed the corps of Agenti di Polizia to which you specially belong, though ours is auxiliary to yours; and which will be sufficient explanation. The doctor is an especial friend of mine.’

‘Hum! ah!’ (these were mental exclamations;) ‘quite sufficient explanation—quite. Your friend wrote to you all particulars, of course, concerning Alberto Mariano and his mission in Milan?’

‘Yes; so that we might, if occasion required it, act together.’

‘A prudent precaution. The doctor is a far-seeing man. Pray what may be his name? I do not remember to have heard it.’ (I knew it as well as I did my own—Doctor Manzini.)

‘His name? *Corpo di Bacco!* what a wretched memory I have for proper names! I could not recall yours. It was the same when I was serving as sergeant with my regiment in Africa—I could never remember the names of the men of my company. But for that I should have attained the grade of lieutenant. The doctor’s name? That I should forget it! I will tell you to-morrow. It is of course subscribed to his letter.’

‘Was it not,’ I said—‘for now it strikes me that I once heard him so addressed by the chevalier—was it not Roberti?’

‘Certainly it was—Roberti! To be sure, Roberti! And now, camarade, let me ask if you can throw any light upon the insulting comedy in which we were made to figure so absurdly to-day at the Villa Felice?’

‘Not I. You must have noticed that I was as much confounded—mystified—as yourself.’

‘I did—I did! I strongly suspect—very strongly suspect—that a certain countess is leagued with Palestro. If I were only sure, that haughty dame would be at my mercy! Do you know,’ he added abruptly, ‘the Countess Gloriosa?’

‘I have seen and conversed with her. Letters of introduction to her were given me at Turin.’

‘Ah, yes! that would be so. Malediction! if I could only obtain proof—proof of her traitorous double-dealing! But she is far too cautious a player for that. Perhaps,’ said he, ‘you may be able to aid me. If so, in the event of success, we will share the reward—the money-reward—that is, only the money-reward!’ he added, with a laugh which the sinister tone and smile made ferocious. ‘As for the silly jester Palestro,’ he resumed, after a moody pause—‘as for the silly jester and fool Palestro, he shall find that to make a laughing-stock of Signor Mano is to play with fire. Adieu, Signor Mariano; we shall soon meet again.’

He left me as much puzzled as before. Likely, indeed, that he did not know my real name, or that of the doctor! And yet, what possible motive could he have for pretending he did not? Surely he did not expect, by such a shallow artifice as that, to make me believe he, after all, knew very little about me, that he did not really correspond with Doctor Manzini, but had been told by some tattling gossip what had passed between me and De Jomieres. He, too, who admitted he knew I belonged to the police of Turin! He could not have been so soft-headed as that! He soft-headed! The devil would one day find that capacious cranium of his an unusually hard nut to crack, or I much deceived myself. And yet, for all my sententious superfine reasoning, it was, I afterwards found, absolutely true that Mano did *not* know, at

that time, my real name, nor that of Doctor Manzini; nor did the physician know *him* by name, person, or reputation.

The next morning I received a note from the Countess Gloriosa. It contained, in a disguised hand, this sentence only—'Beware of Mano!'—subscribed by the letter which it had been agreed would be adopted by her, should the countess be desirous of communicating with me. Such notes of warning, affording no guidance for avoiding the peril with which you are menaced, are the reverse of exhilarating. However, I was fastened to the stake, and could not, if I would, avoid the duel with Mano, if it was his game to set upon me. I must deal with him as I best could.

I was still pondering the two warnings I had received—one from the landlord of the hotel, the other from the Gloriosa—to guard against a man whom I had spoken with but upon two occasions, who could have no personal quarrel with me, and professed warm friendship for his new comrade, as he was pleased to name me, when Signor Palestro made his appearance. He looked yet paler, more anxious, than when I first saw him on the previous day at the Villa Felice. He, too, came—though not solely for that—to bid me beware of Signor Mano, as he called himself.

'Do you know, M. le Chevalier,' said he, 'that I feel an instinctive dread of that man. His

return to Milan seems to be the harbinger of defeat, perhaps of death to some of us.'

'Dreams, signor, dreams! Cast them off; I do not believe in supernatural warnings—that the event of to-morrow ever foretells itself, except by hard fact, which can only point to one determinate conclusion.'

'My reason agrees with you; but imagination, fancy, nervousness, call it what you will, is as great, nay, more powerful than reason. The fit will pass, as such gloomy forebodings have passed before. I will, at least, hope so. But I have an important communication to make,' added Palestro, sinking his voice almost to a whisper. 'It has been suddenly arranged, since you left the Villa Felice yesterday afternoon, that we hold a solemn conclave to-morrow evening. The reason is, that our most trusted chief and guide will to-morrow arrive in Milan, and after meeting us and unfolding the national programme, so far as it has yet been settled, depart instantly on his return to England.'

'May I ask the name of this much-trusted chief?'

'Yes, I will confide it to your honour. He is ——.'

'Good heavens!' I exclaimed; 'why, he is a proscribed man—the most hated and feared of all Italians by the Austrian Government. He was in some way implicated in that terrible business

of the Brothers Bandiera. Should he be caught in Milan his fate would be sealed. They would shoot or hang him with as little ceremony as they would a dog.'

'Quite true; but he will not be caught in Milan. I have no fear of that. He is the tutelary genius of Italy, and under the especial protection of the Eternal: there have been many proofs of that.'

'Ah, Signor Palestro, a blind superstitious reliance upon special interpositions of Providence is not only folly, but presumptuous irreverent folly; as if man could interpret the counsel of God!'

'I cannot reason upon the matter, M. le Chevalier, any more than I could with respect to gloomy forebodings, for which no tangible causes exist; but I have an unbounded confidence in the fortunes of ——. The Austrian bullet is not cast yet, nor ever will be, that shall end that noble life. But I have many calls to make, and must be brief. The place of assemblage,' continued Palestro, in a yet more subdued tone, 'is the Duomo [Cathedral] in the catacombs; the time, immediately after vespers.'

'The Duomo! catacombs! immediately after vespers!' I ejaculated. 'Would not it be as well to defer burial till after the firing parties have prepared us for that lugubrious ceremony? Have you all lost your heads, or did you never have any?

You intend putting your trust in priests, do you? You might just as prudently put your trust in princes. Why, the priests—very good men as the majority of them may be—are, with a few brilliant exceptions, champions of the divine right of kings.'

'Not the clergy of Milan; the Austrian iron has entered into their souls as well as into ours. Do you forget that the Archbishop of Milan was one of the first at the barricades, arrayed in his pontifical robes, advancing his mitre, and holding aloft his crozier, when our glorious city rose in insurrection, and expelled Radetsky with his Austrians?'

'I remember. Well, you should be the best judges. A French officer, I am told, will not in any case have much to fear.'

'Nothing whatever beyond a temporary detention. I will give you the password and countersign, and bid you farewell till we meet in the catacombs.'

Signor Palestro was passing forth, but paused irresolutely. 'There is one fear haunts me more powerfully than I care to own. It relates to the Countess Gloriosa. You, M. le Chevalier, are in her confidence, I believe.'

'I have no right to say that, not the slightest.'

'Well, but you might drop a hint, of which she would take heed?'

'Yes, that is possible, I may say probable.'

‘This is my apprehension,’ continued Palestro. ‘Few things which she wants to discover remain hidden from that lady; she is a perfect marvel at scenting out a plot. She will, depend upon it, not only find that we meet at the hour named in the catacombs of the Duomo—that she would be sure to know—but that —— will be there.’

‘My life upon it the countess will not betray him!’ I exclaimed with emotion.

‘I am as sure of that as you, M. le Chevalier, can be. I do not apprehend danger from her, but for her. Let us speak frankly. The Countess Gloriosa would dare much for the liberation of Italy; but only on condition that Victor Emmanuel should be Italy’s constitutional king. We have talked of that, I think, before. The fear I am impressed with, then, is, that the courageous indomitable countess will contrive to obtain the password or countersign, and be herself present in some disguise or other, in order to hear with her own ears what are the precise plans of the Italian patriots; so that Victor Emmanuel may be able to counteract them, not in the interest of the Austrians, or the Austrian’s Italian Viceroy, but in his own. Now if she ventures upon that perilous step—she has done as rash things before—and it should be proved that she was present when —— was giving counsel to Giovine Italia, we should never see her again; an Austrian fortress would be her living tomb, in which she would be

buried quickly; she would be lost to us for ever, and I should be the most wretched of human beings; the sun of my life would set in darkness ere it was yet noon.'

'How is that, Signor Palestro?' I blurtingly broke out. 'Corpo di Bacco! you cannot be madly enamoured of a lady who, if not old enough to be your mother, is certainly much past the freshness of youth?' (I had not then heard of the Countess Gloriosa's daughter. She was completing her education at a convent.)

'No, no, no; you mistake. I may explain to you one of these days. The Countess Gloriosa was at La Scala last evening. We have our spies as well as the Government *de facto*. Signor Mano was there, had intruded himself into the countess's box, and annoyed her with his vulgar assiduities.'

'That is quite true, I can bear witness. I was in the pit, and keenly observant of Signor Mano.'

'Ha! It is conjectured, not without probable cause, that Mano is endeavouring, *per fas et nefas*, to get the Countess Gloriosa into his power. He is an artful villain, and, we are told, a fellow of quick wit and prompt resource, who will hesitate at no means, however infamous or apparently desperate, to compass his ends. You, M. le Chevalier, had an interview with him here after he returned from La Scala. Did anything escape

him which would cause you to believe that he harbours evil designs against the countess ?

‘That escaped him, Signor Palestro, which left no possible doubt upon my mind that he cherishes evil designs against that lady.’

I related as nearly as I could what he said relative to the Countess Gloriosa.

‘Strange,’ said Palestro, darting at me a searching look,—‘strange that Signor Mano should so suddenly take the Chevalier de Jomière into his confidence—and such confidence.’

Diavolo ! How nearly had I betrayed myself ! Confound my glib tongue ! I felt my cheeks glow ; but instantly rallying, I said,

‘You forget, Signor Palestro, that there had, as far as he was concerned, grown up a sort of fellow-feeling between us, he fancying that I had been duped and mocked, as he was, at the Villa ~~Palice~~—’

‘True, true !’ interrupted Palestro.

‘Then, again, he knew I had seen him conversing, or attempting to converse, with the beautiful countess at the opera. He was much excited, and, notwithstanding his seemingly iron stolidity, is, I am sure, a man very prone to be unduly excited by fierce gusts of passion. He was not master of himself when speaking of the countess, whose barely civil toleration of his impertinence had stung him to the quick.’

‘I quite comprehend, Captain de Jomière.

Will you, then, kindly warn Madame la Comtesse to be more on her guard than ever, having such a sleuth-hound as Mano constantly at her heels?

‘I will do so, be assured. I am bound to do so, if but in requital for a message she sent me not half an hour since, bidding me beware of Mano.’

Palestro and I then parted with mutual expressions of goodwill. I know those expressions were sincere on my side, and have no reason to doubt they were equally so on his.

The Countess Gloriosa heard me with smiling attention.

‘I am flattered by your solicitude, M. le Chevalier,’ she said when I had finished; ‘but do not alarm yourself on my account. Mano cannot prevail against me. He ought to be quite sure of that, unless he is as great a fool as rascal. ~~Look~~ well to yourself, M. de Jomières. You stand within his danger. I do not; *soyez tranquille*.’

I withdrew, having effected no good whatever. I had repeated, with as much literal fidelity as delicacy permitted, the fellow’s threats of vengeance if he could but obtain proof of her complicity with the Revolution.

How slowly, I well remember, the lingering hours crept past! I did not hear either from Palestro, Mano, or the Countess Gloriosa. I was left to my own reflections—very disagreeable com-

pany just then. A change, if not in itself positively desirable, would have been welcomed.

At about noon on the second day the proprietor of the Maximilian Hotel bowed himself, with many apologies, into my apartment, and requested my attention for a short time upon a very important subject. I requested him to take a seat, of which invitation he very deliberately availed himself, and, with a most portentous look, said,

‘M. le Chevalier de Jomieres, captain in the Third French Dragoons—a very distinguished regiment, in a service where all are distinguished—we, you, I, and others, are about this evening to toss into the lottery of life our lives and all we possess, not knowing in the least whether we shall gain a prize or a blank. Blanks, and black ones too, being the safest to wager upon—’

‘If you think so, why not withdraw from such dangerous associations?’

‘M. le Chevalier has not waited to seize my whole meaning. He himself has little to fear. And I, humble proprietor of an hotel, fear nothing, whatever cause I may have to do so. No; but I hold that to defend your own life and those of your friends is not the less a duty because you and they may be content to lose them, if it must be so.’

‘That, my friend, is incontestable. It is a truth which, as we say, *saut aux yeux*!’

‘Exactly. My French will, I fear, scorch your

ears, M. le Chevalier, though I did serve two years and some months in La Grande Armée under the great Napoleon.'

'Indeed! But you must have been very young at the time?'

'It was at the close of the war. I fought at Waterloo; was wounded slightly in that battle. I was then nineteen years of age; I am now, consequently, in my fifty-third year, hale and vigorous, as you see. Let us pass on to business. The best friend I ever had in my life—my father and mother I do not remember, they both died when I was very young—the best friend, I was saying, I ever had is the Countess Gloriosa. I used to dandle her on my knee, being a domestic in her excellent father's establishment before the conscription caught me. I returned to the Château d'Ivry, and resumed my service. I remained till M. le Comte died and Mademoiselle married. Her favour, her bounty, followed me. I owe to her my present position. You will understand, then, M. le Chevalier, that I would at any time shield her life with mine.'

'Certainly, I can understand and readily believe.'

'Good! Well, I have constantly watched over Madame la Comtesse since she became a widow and it was her good pleasure to devote herself to state politics. "Eugène," I said to myself, "it is a dangerous game that Madame la Comtesse is

engaged in, but thou hast no right to question the propriety of that step on her part. Thou hast—*Dieu merci!*—neither wife nor child; art growing rich, thanks primarily to Madame, and must constitute thyself her earthly guardian angel, and thou canst have others to watch over her beside thyself.” I have ‘done my simple duty, Monsieur le Chevalier, towards my beautiful benefactress, and she herself well knows that in the zealous performance of that simple duty I and my trusty fellows have saved her, in the very nick of time, from great dangers. She counts upon Eugène,’ added the propriétaire, with natural exultation, ‘more than she is herself conscious that she does. Madame has the courage of a lion, yet I doubt that she would trust herself in the catacombs to-night but for the certainty always present to her mind that not only Eugène and his faithful Giuseppe and Enrico will be there, but that they will have previously ferreted out all the plots and contrivances to compass her ruin, hatched or hatching, and by whom. Ah, per Bacco! yes, Madame la Comtesse Gloriosa knows that, but le scélérat, the double traitor, does not even suspect that he has been walking, working under the sleepless observance of Eugène and Compagnie, from almost the first hour he for this last time set foot in Milan. He will know, when the knowledge will be more novel than pleasant.’

‘State the matter simply, my friend,’ said I.

‘It is well to clearly understand each other when affairs of moment are in hand. I admire your devotion to Madame la Comtesse Gloriosa ; but I do not understand what part you expect me to play in shielding her against the machinations or the open violence of this miserable Mano.’

‘I shall state the matter as simply as possible. Monsieur le Chevalier will excuse an old servitor of Madame’s, whose heart is his mouth ?’

‘Make no apology, friend Saffi ; I greatly honour you.’

‘~~Remerciment~~, Monsieur le Chevalier. This, then, is the situation : Madame la Comtesse Gloriosa goes to-night to the catacombs, disguised as a young cavalier. Mano, who will also be there disguised, will recognise Madame, though she will not know him.’

‘Stop, my friend. If Manò knows that Signor —, whose presence for a few hours in Milan is the occasion of the assemblage to-night, the game is lost. Signor — will be seized by the Austrian sbirri, and probably shot before sunrise.’

‘Chut ! Monsieur le Chevalier. There is no danger of that. Palestro, I know, prated to you the other morning about a special Providence watching over the life of Signor —. That is child’s talk ; no one knows it better than Palestro himself. Still Signor — is perfectly safe ; and I will tell you why. It is well known to every Italian, and to none more clearly than to Mano,

that should any one betray, or cause to be betrayed, Signor —— into the power of his enemies, all the armies of Europe would not be able to prevent an Italian dagger from drinking the traitor's life-blood before a brief month, or less, had passed. No, no; Mano will not touch *him*. No reward that might be offered would tempt him, whatever his greed of gold, to do so—well knowing, as he does, that if he did, although he should take the wings of the morning and flee to the uttermost corner of the earth, an Italian dagger would find his heart. Signor —— is quite safe, rely upon it.'

'But Madame la Comtesse Gloriosa has no such ægis to shield her. She is an object of suspicion to many of the patriots. They are fools; but that does not alter the fact. She may, therefore, be safely dealt with by Mano and his satellites; would be, but for us, Monsieur le Chevalier de Jomières.'

'Go on; let us arrive at a clear understanding.'

'That is just and *raisonnable*, M. le Capitaine de Jomières. I myself, Giuseppe, and Enrico, have always gone disguised to these night-meetings; not masquerade disguise, you will understand, but such a change in the dress, make up, colour of hair, and so on, as to prevent recognition—a task easy of accomplishment. Now, the scélérat Mano knows quite well the disguises we have generally—I may say have always—worn, and

would recognise us in an instant. But we shall throw dust in his eyes this time. Mine, Giuseppe, and Enrico's appearance will be altogether different from what it used to be ; so Signor Mano will be so far baffled. I will now describe to you, M. le Chevalier, the habiliments in which Madame la Comtesse Gloriosa, Giuseppe, Enrico, and Mano will present themselves. Pray mark me well.' Mine host gave me a minute, prolix description of the disguises to be worn by the individuals named. ' Shall you,' he asked, ' remember these descriptions, so that you will make no mistake ?'

' Yes, I believe so.'

' Ah, well,' said Saffi, ' be sure to remember how Madame la Comtesse will be attired ; never mind for the rest. The lecture or exhortation finished,' continued the enthusiastic landlord, ' Signor — will first vanish, and very quickly afterwards the whole assemblage will quietly disperse, not more than two, as a rule, walking together. You, monsieur, will, I need hardly ask, wear your uniform of a French Capitaine de Dragons ?'

' Yes ; that will be prudent, I think.'

' Without the least doubt it will be prudent ; and I should also wear the thickly padded military cloak which I have seen in monsieur's bedchamber.'

' For what reason ? The evenings are warm.'

' Not too warm. But I will tell you why, in

my opinion, you should wear it upon this occasion, even were the evening ever so warm. Directly the lecture or exhortation is concluded, and the company begin to disperse, you will whisper in the ear of Madame la Comtesse Gloriosa, whom we shall take care shall be near to you, "Eugène advises that I escort you home." That will be sufficient. You will leave together; not arm-in-arm, mind. Being both in male attire, to do so would not in itself be *convenable*. You walk briskly along, Madame la Comtesse, who knows every step of the way, guiding. It is a lonesome way in several places. You will be protected by the thickly padded cloak, both your arms will be free, and take care that your sword is loose in its scabbard. Now, M. le Chevalier, do not stare as if I were contemplating your exposure to certain death. I have but suggested common precaution.

'Precaution against what — whom, friend Saffi?'

'Why, against Mano and his two confederate ruffians, who will, no doubt—at least, I have no doubt—rush upon you with uplifted daggers the moment you reach a silent, suitable spot. Their object will be to kill you. Mano bears you ill-will, I know not for what; but he does not require that incentive to give you a steel passport to the other world. Yes, the object of the assassins will be to kill you, or any other man who should be

escorting the Countess Gloriosa, who herself will be safe from murderous assault. Mano's game will be, having disposed of you, to bind and gag the countess, carry her off, and, under threat of denouncing her as an active agent of the Revolution, compel her to submit to such terms—the vile detestable scoundrel—as he may dictate. Malediction !' added the landlord, 'with a partly stifled oath, 'had I the villain's head beneath my heel I could grind it into jelly.'

'My good friend,' said I, 'your exposition of what is proposed to be done is admirable in its simplicity and clearness; but do you know I am not at all in love with the part you have kindly assigned me. The main effort of these assassins will be, you say, to kill me; and you coolly propose that I should deliberately put myself in a position which will afford the said assassins a capital opportunity of effecting their amiable design. Really now, my friend, does not that seem to be carrying the joke a little too far?'

'There is no joke, there can be no joke, will be no joke in the matter, M. le Chevalier—'

'Holy blue! I agree with you there; no joke for me, that is quite certain.'

'What are you thinking about, M. le Capitaine du Troisième Régiment de Dragons Français? Your thick cloak will ward off a dagger stroke; and surely your sabre will suffice for effective defence till I, Giuseppe, and Enrico run up to

your aid? and we shall not have been many paces off, rely upon it.'

'Well, that gives the affair a more inviting aspect. Still—and pray what do you propose doing with the scoundrels, supposing them to be overpowered?' It struck me at the moment that I would not, for several reasons, wish to be confronted with 'Mano at his examination by the Criminal Quæstor.

'As to that,' said the landlord of the Maximilian Hotel, 'we must be governed by circumstances. Madame la Comtesse will, I know, never be safe while Mano lives. The Grand Canal is very deep, and will not be far off.'

I had no special objection to urge against that incident in the programme. Caught red-handed, Mano would well deserve his doom, which would be but an anticipation of his death by the public executioner. But I boggled and hesitated till friend Saffi got fiercely angry, though even he could not help admitting that the enterprise, so far as I was concerned, had a rather dismal look. However, I at last consented. Some minor arrangements were agreed upon, a capital dinner was brought in, which we enjoyed, I am quite ashamed to say, in the spirit of the heathen saying, 'Get drunk and be merry, for to-morrow (perhaps that very evening) ye die.'

Perhaps I am exaggerating the mad recklessness which, from different impulses, possessed us both—

Saffi from a chivalrous feudal devotion to the Countess Gloriosa; whilst the natural rebound, aided by good cheer and the very best wine the cellar of the Maximilian could boast of, vigorous health and youth, and a constitutionally joyous temperament, completely recovered me from the depression under which I had suffered during the previous two days. Possibly, too, being in the public confessional, I may as well make a clean breast of it—possibly, too, the thought that Mano would most likely be effectively disposed of, swept from my path, and by no crime on my part, had something to do with the exaltation of spirit with which I arrayed myself in the *dragon's* dress, buckled on the *dragon* sabre, threw my thickly padded cloak over my shoulder, and strode forth, a mighty Paladin in my own great conceit, to the rescue of beauty and discomfiture of base knaves.

The glorious Duomo was tolerably well filled with worshippers and loungers, and with a larger proportion of the male sex than I had usually seen at even-service in the churches. The men wore, to me, a strange anxious aspect; and I noticed that not one that fell under my observation joined in the Gregorian chanting of the Psalms. The officiating priests too, I thought, looked paler than the brilliant light of the altar and sanctuary actually caused them to do. That

also might be fancy. There were no Austrian uniforms in the crowd; and I could not single out, from Saffi's description, either the Gloriosa, Mano, or other of the actors in the little drama, a leading rôle in which had been allotted to me. A few moments' reflection, had I taken somewhat less wine, would have suggested that they were not such fools as to expose themselves in however cleverly made up disguises to the public scrutiny. Only those amongst the conspirators who were too insignificant to attract attention or require disguise, or, like myself, believed themselves to be hedged in by barriers which the Austrian sbirri would not care to overleap, were, I might be sure, to be found at such a time amongst the miscellaneous throng of worshippers.

The service appeared to be of insufferable length. The Gregorian chants, given in slower time than ever—the catechism of children by an old mumbling priest, blissfully unconscious that there were aught but dead men and women in the catacombs below—were enough to drive an impatient irascible man, detained on the brink of a momentous enterprise, to despair. But all things must have an end. The service, catechism, etcetera, finished, the cathedral gradually emptied itself—a considerable number of the congregation, all males, gliding off, through side doors, into, it might have been supposed, the sacristy. I touched a pillar with one of my hands in the way I had

been instructed ; and though the action was but momentary, it had been observed by watchful eyes, as almost immediately an acolyte plucked my cloak, and, with his finger on his lips, silently motioned me to follow.

We descended a number of steps, and I quickly found myself in the vast gloomy chambers of the dead. A strange chilling sensation seized my heart upon entering the vast vault, strewn with marble tombs gleaming in their sepulchral whiteness from out the shadowy darkness. The expression, shadowy darkness, I use literally : numerous shadows of men—so indistinct, or but for a moment indistinctly visible, were the gliding conspirators—now emerging into the faint light shed by half a dozen lamps, now from behind monuments, or from out the thick darkness, and immediately vanishing again. It would have been impossible for me to have made a probable guess at the numbers present ; but there must have been a considerable muster—over two hundred, I am quite sure. Soon the great doors were closed and barred, there was a running murmur amongst the visitors, and presently a man, ordinarily attired, with nothing to distinguish him but his fine intellectual, yet, I thought, sad mournful aspect, stood before us, at a kind of central spot, illumined by several judiciously-placed lights. The silence, as soon as the hum of welcome and applause had subsided, was

intense. The new-comer was the celebrated Signor —, of whom I had so long heard, but had never seen. He at once addressed the audience—which eagerly drank in and treasured up every word he uttered—with the fervid impassioned eloquence by which his speeches and writings are distinguished. The discourse was worthy of the orator and his theme—the regeneration of Italy, the reërection of the Rome of the People upon the ruins of the Rome of the Cæsars and of the Popes. There was nothing incendiary in the harangue; war was indeed declared to be the only means, under God, by which the grand object, the establishment of a free Italian Republic, extending from the Alps to the Adriatic, was to be achieved; but it was honest open war, not the dagger and torch work of cowards unfit for freedom. Signor — spoke for about an hour and a half, and then vanished as suddenly, silently, as he had appeared.

The audience immediately began to disperse, and I looked about for Madame la Comtesse. She was almost close to my elbow, admirably disguised after the fashion described by the landlord of the Maximilian. I recognised her instantly, and, touching her arm, whispered the words dictated by Saffi.

‘It is well, M. le Chevalier,’ she replied, in the same tone; ‘but do not let us hurry. Let the mass of the patriots leave first.’

I of course obeyed. We waited for about ten minutes.

‘Now,’ whispered the Gloriosa, ‘keep close by me. We shall leave by a private gate.’

In two or three minutes we were in the open air, and walking swiftly. There were but few persons about in the more frequented parts we had to traverse, and presently we were passing through an obscure locality, where no sound of human steps was heard except our own.

‘This,’ thought I, as I loosed my sabre in its sheath, and my breath came thick and short, ‘this would be a fitting spot for the perpetration of the foul deed which, if Saffi has been correctly informed—’

My mental cogitation was suddenly put an end to by the muffled noise, as it were, of the swift feet of several persons close behind. I sprang round, drawing forth my sabre as I did so, and received on the instant two dagger-strokes; one of which slightly wounded me in the neck, the other was not dealt with sufficient force to pierce my cloak. The countess screamed lustily, and I struck down one of the assassins. There were four, not three, as mine host had anticipated. One, uttering fearful threats, seized upon the rash countess, and the remaining two would probably have soon made an end of me, but that they themselves were leapt upon and stilettoed with fierce eagerness by Saffi and his faithful

Giuseppe and Enrico. The ruffian who held the Gloriosa fled as fast as his legs could carry him. Mano and his two confederate assassins, including the one whose skull it was found I had cloven almost in twain, had departed on a journey upon which no traveller retraces his steps.

I hastened away from the frightful scene, which had passed like a flash of lightning, with the still terrified countess, after she had tremblingly murmured her thanks to her devoted Saffi. I heard no more of that night's business. As the landlord of the Maximilian Hotel had remarked, the waters of the Grand Canal were dark and deep and not far off; and in that unquiet time the finding of the bodies of two or three persons of no mark did not excite much comment or attention. We of course—Madame la Comtesse inclusive—kept our own counsel. The intending assassins were justly caught in their own devices; their deaths were upon their own heads; our souls were free of stain as far as they were concerned.

There being nothing more for me to do in Milan, I returned without delay to the Piedmontese capital, to say that I had found nothing affecting the king's government to report from the metropolis of Lombardy. My superiors thought otherwise. It was much to learn what had been ascertained—that no attempt would be countenanced by the influential chiefs of the revolution

except such as were made in the face of day. The Government being satisfied, I was abundantly so. I may mention that I had not been long in Turin when I discovered, by the merest accident, that Mano had heard from a gossiping fool in the king's household, with whom he had some slight acquaintance, and who had arrived at a village situated at about midway between Turin and Milan to be present at the funeral of his father, a garbled version of what had occurred at parting between me and M. le Chevalier de Jomières (who, I remark *en passant*, was quite recovered from his illness when I returned to Turin); and that I, one of the Agenti di Polizio, whose name he, the informant, had heard but forgotten, was gone to personate in Milan, for some political purpose, the French captain. As to the alleged deadly enmity of Mano towards myself, I could find no evidence of it, and much doubt that it ever existed.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ITALIAN PRESTIDIGITATEUR.

IN 1851, at the time of the first Great Exhibition, I was ordered to England, there to watch the sayings and doings of Italian refugees.

Prestidigitateur is, I believe, the newest synonym for conjurer. The species is, however, a very ancient one, and I do not suppose sleight-of-hand professors humbug mankind more invitingly, or are much cleverer, than before they assumed new titles. I judge by Signor Brofferio, a wizard whom I have never seen surpassed, and much doubt, that I ever shall. He gave me an ~~immensity~~ of trouble, and the best or worst of it was that I thought him, for a time, one of the simplest, most guileless, of mortals. That was about the cleverest of his tricks.

I met with Signor Brofferio at the Crystal Palace, Hyde Park. He was never in my experience absent. He could supply any amount of information with respect to the objects exhibited in Italian, German, Spanish, English, Russian, French. In a colloquial sense, he was one of the most accomplished linguists I had ever seen. I quite envied him. What age was he? That was a question much more easily asked than answered.

Sometimes, early in the morning, when the freshness of summer dew seemed to sparkle upon his shining face, I should have guessed him to be not more than thirty. At other times, after a, perhaps, bustling day's work, if my eye fell upon him at a moment he believed himself unobserved, I should have set him down for sixty. At any rate, he was a very clever fellow; a fellow of large resource, gay as a lark—an assumed gaiety, I sometimes thought, carmine upon a shrivelled cheek—and possessed of genuine wit and humour. One circumstance more than any other gave me a high opinion of his acuteness and sagacity. He very soon, as you English say, reckoned me up. My commercial standing did not stand his scrutiny for more than three or four days. He did not hint his discovery in words; but the glance of his eye, the curl of his lip now and then, were quite sufficiently interpreters of his thoughts.

I received one day—previous to receiving precise instructions or information concerning others—a memorandum, slipped in, it seemed, by after-thought into the packet of papers, respecting one Carlo Brofferio, a rogue of the first quality. He was the most successful gambler, the most skilful cheater at cards, or other game of chance or skill, in Europe. He had broken banks at Paris, Turin, Milan, and Baden-Baden; but in consequence of reckless habits and an utterly extravagant mode of living was often reduced to extreme destitution,

from which condition he was, however, pretty soon to arise, after a brief eclipse, like a Phoenix from its ashes; more resplendent than ever. It was believed, the Signor, finding that for a time the atmosphere of continental hells was becoming too hot even for him, had betaken himself to London, doubtless anticipating that a golden harvest might be reaped from the world-crowd that would be assembled there. It would be well that I kept a sharp look-out upon the movements of Signor Brofferio: there were reasons, apart from his cheating exploits, why that should be done. A description of the adept's personal appearance was subjoined. I perused it attentively, but no face that I had seen answered to those pen-and-ink lineaments.

Considering the matter well over, after gathering, from the tone of a subsequent communication from Signor Pinelli, that some one of influence in high quarters at Turin was desirous of meeting with Brofferio, I concluded that I could not do better than consult with my quick-eyed, sharp-thoughted friend, Rosco, which was the name I knew him by. I took the earliest opportunity of doing so. Rosco was charmed by such a proof of my confidence, my flattering appreciation of his 'detective' powers.

'You could not,' said he, rubbing his hands gleefully, 'have applied to a better source for information. I know Signor Brofferio well; know

where he will be to-night; can introduce you to the society of dupes and cormorants whom he fleeces and skins. Will you go with me, say at eleven?’

‘Most willingly. Where shall we meet?’

Rosco hesitated for a moment, then said,

‘Come with me.’

I followed him, and we were presently in the dining- or drinking-room at the Crystal Palace, the existence of which was at once ignored and winked at by authority.

‘Look,’ said he, ‘you see that man in a blouse just opposite—he is smoking a cigar; he with the bushy black beard? well, he or I will meet you this evening at nine precisely at the White Horse; that is, outside of the White Horse, Piccadilly. You know the White Horse?’

‘Yes, quite well.’

‘I, or my friend yonder—for it has suddenly occurred to me that I may have an engagement elsewhere—will meet and conduct you to where Signor Brofferio holds his *séances*.’

‘Let it be so,’ I said carelessly; ‘I shall know your friend.’

I awoke next morning drowsily, reluctantly, and with a terrible headache. My wife was not in the room. Had I, who had never been betrayed into excess, allowed myself to be hocussed? It seemed so. I remembered a mass, a crowd of

things, but nothing distinctly. Marietta came in with a cup of hot coffee. She was pale, half alarmed as it seemed to me.

‘Giuseppe,’ she said timidly, ‘I have brought you some coffee; it may do you good.’

‘What is the matter?’ I asked. .

‘We will speak of that presently,’ said Marietta. ‘Do you remember nothing?’

I drank the coffee before replying. It cleared my head considerably. The events of the previous night came back and unrolled themselves before me as in a panorama. I met the bushy black-bearded man at the White Horse. He saluted me, and we went together to a largish house in Surrey-street, Strand, not far from the present side-entrance to the Strand Theatre. There was a large crowded room, and the persons present were principally English, the majority females. Signor Brofferio, the Wizard of the South, was, no doubt, a very clever conjurer; but that kind of thing of which I, all Italians, have seen much, neither greatly surprised nor amused me. As to Brofferio himself, he was more of a puzzle than his juggling performances. Where *had* I seen or known the man? I could not tell; but surely that cunning glimmer of the eye was familiar to me. At last the, to me, wearisome exhibition was at an end. That is, the main display, the legerdemain rubbish. A *divertissement* followed, in which there was singing and dancing. I was not more amused

by that than ~~the~~ the chief feature, the *pièce de résistance* of the entertainment. The audience thinned rapidly, and presently Rosco seated himself at my side. He came in very quietly, spoke a few words to my bushy black-bearded friend—a saturnine fellow who had scarcely spoken to me—made an excuse for not having joined me before, asked my opinion of Signor Brofferio's talents, did not attend to my answer, if I made one, and presently invited me to leave. I did so. 'There was a sort of bar ~~room~~ anteroom.' I remember having something to drink ~~where~~, and passing on to an inner room where ladies flauntily dressed were promenading, attended by vulgar swells. There was music too, and erratic couples were waltzing. Others were playing cards. Did I play or waltz? I thought not; but could not be quite sure. After that a mistiness of memory came over me: all objects became indistinct, confused, involved. Had I been really engaged in a fierce quarrel, been hustled, knocked down, robbed, and rescued at last by Signor Rosco and his black-bearded friend?

I repeated these disjointed, incoherent recollections to my wife. She smiled sadly, sweetly-sadly. She was so good, so kind—*is* so good, so kind. 'Ah, caro mio, you remarked only that; well, it is so far true—exact, I mean. But for the excellent Rosco and his friend Luigi—'

'Luigi! are you sure the name of the man was Luigi?' This question I asked explosively,

a flash of light, as it were, glancing upon my fevered brain ; ‘ Luigi—’

‘ I heard Rosco call him by that name in the passage, when they had helped you out of the cabriolet in which you were brought home. Afterwards he called him Jacopo, which I suppose to be his baptismal name.’

‘ I do not suppose so. Proceed, Marietta.’

‘ Proceed ! Madre di Dio, there is not much more to say ; you were insensible ; Rosco said you had been assaulted and robbed.’

‘ Robbed, was I ? My pockets were rifled ?’

‘ Yes ; but Rosco and his friend, with the aid of the public force, as I was told by them, obtained the restitution of your watch, chain, and money.’

I was again silent, meditative. The English police had assisted in obtaining the restitution of the money and valuables of which I had been plundered, and had not secured the robbers. Strange ! I questioned Marietta over and over again, but she could add nothing more towards my enlightenment. The coffee did not, after a time, seem to agree with me so well as at the first. Dr. Normandy, a famous chemist, with whom I had formed a casual acquaintance, lived at that time in Judd-street, Brunswick-square. He has died lately, and was a man of rare ability. He did not practise as a physician, though he had been one of the commission, at the head of which was the

celebrated Dr. Majendie, deputed by the French Government to acquaint themselves with the nature of Asiatic cholera, which in 1830 was committing such cruel ravages in Newcastle. I had great confidence not only in his medical skill, but general judgment. It were better, it struck me, that he should be consulted at once. My wife forthwith despatched a messenger to Judd-street. Dr. Normandy was soon with me. He quickly decided that I had been drugged. The recovery of the watch and money puzzled us. To what purpose, that being so, could I have been hocused? Rosco had promised to call during the day: better wait and quietly question *him*. Meanwhile a draught, the prescription for which my friendly doctor wrote, would set me to rights physically. There had been no intention, Dr. Normandy said, to permanently, vitally injure me. That might be, but why should I have been hocused at all? I had lost no money. My funds were not so abundant but that I could tell how much, or about how much, I must have had in my purse. Not a coin seemed to be missing. Papers I never carried about me. No doubt I had read the name of Luigi in connection with that of Brofferio, in those last documents from Turin. I would examine them by and by, after I had seen Rosco.

He soon presented himself with much *empresement*; but, or a vague suspicion on my part wronged him, he looked conscious—confused,

spite of a forced laughing gaiety of manner. He explained, in a hurried kind of way, that I had been induced to play cards with rogues, that Brofferio had first interfered in my behalf, finally himself and Jacopo. The end of it was the giving up of the winnings I had unfairly lost, and that he (Rosco) and Jacopo brought me home in a cab, I being in a state of utter insensibility. He (Rosco) had arranged, subject of course to my approval, that Brofferio should pay me a visit, not, perhaps, that day but the next. I at once assented. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to make the acquaintance of Signor Brofferio. Rosco did not long remain. He left me in a disquieted state of mind. Directly he was gone I leaped out of bed, opened my writing-desk, searched for the packet of papers recently received by me. They were gone! They had been abstracted, stolen! I made a thorough but vain search, returned to bed, and rang the bell. It was answered by Marietta.

‘Who,’ said I, ‘beside yourself, has been in this room whilst I have been asleep or insensible?’

‘Rosco, and Luigi, or Jacopo, no one else. I,’ added my wife, ‘was absent from the chamber about ten minutes whilst they were here. Rosco asked me to fetch a jug of warm water, in which it would be well that I should mix a little mustard; this was to bathe your temples. Why do your

eyes question me in such earnest fashion, Giuseppe?’

‘You observed nothing peculiar, Marietta, in the demeanour—in the doings of those men?’ I said evasively.

‘Nothing, Giuseppe; ah, yes,’ added my wife, checking herself, as the recollection flashed upon her: ‘ah, yes, there was one circumstance which, though it surprised me at the moment, I have not mentioned. I came softly up the stairs with the warm water, very desirous of not disturbing the good people of the house unnecessarily, and found the door fastened. Let me be exact. The brass handle did not open it from the outside, but then my grasp of it was feeble, in consequence of agitation, and my hand was wet and slipped round the knob. I then tapped upon the panel, and certainly the sound as of a key turned softly in the lock struck my ear; but not being, as you can well believe, Giuseppe, quite myself, I may have been mistaken. The door was immediately opened, and I found both the men assisting in bathing your temples, and placing your head in an easy position. They both looked confused, or I imagined so,’ added my wife.

I was truly confused, confounded! Who were these Brofferios or Roscos, Luigis or Jacopos?

This was a question to which, after much deliberation, I could give no self-satisfactory answer. I consulted my friend, Dr. Normandy,

laying open to him my ideas of the matter. We had several conferences, and he, perhaps, influenced unconsciously by the analytic processes of his profession, suggested that I should deal, or endeavour to deal, separately with the juggling gentleman with whom I had chanced to come in contact. Talk with—examine them separately, of course he meant. That, it seemed to me, would not be very difficult. I was mistaken, with reference to two of the gentlemen. Luigi or Jacopò I could comprehend; but Brofferio or Rosco—whom, by the bye, I never saw in presence of each other—puzzled me strangely. They seemed to have a sort of affinity with each other. In the few conversations I had with them, there was always something cropping out which blended their identities in a strange fashion. Caesar and Pompey, very much alike, especially Pompey. Yet in complexion, tone of voice intonation, colour of hair, no persons could be more dissimilar. Once we were speaking together, I and Brofferio—who had a singularly deep bass voice; Rosco's was a tenor, one might say an alto—when, in answer to a remark of mine referring to the exhibition in the Crystal Palace, he said jocularly, and in a tone which sounded wonderfully like that of Rosco,

‘Ah, yes, yes, I remember; you made that observation more than once in the palazzo!’

‘How!’ said I; ‘why, I never spoke to you,

never saw you at the Crystal Palace. I do not understand.'

Signor Brofferio's swarthy complexion turned fiery red, and his fluent Italian tongue failed him for a moment or two.

'Ah,' said he, quickly recovering himself, 'I was repeating what Rosco told me! It is true that I never met you at the palazzo.'

This casual bit of dialogue, pieced together, as it were, though not quite coherently, certain stray suspicions which the hints of Dr. Normandy had first germed into incipient life. I would make friends with Luigi or Jacopo. I had discerned indications, fitful and transitory, that Signor Jacopo had a strong inclination to take me into his confidence. I would cultivate it.

It required some time to do so; but the feat was at last accomplished. After much hesitation Jacopo, otherwise Luigi, disburdened himself, and a pretty voidance he made.

I had been at the Queen's Theatre, to which Mr. Lumley had given me an order to the pit. I did not wait for the ballet, and was, likely enough, over-excited when I reached home. Feebleness of frame might have had something to do with that, for I had been cruelly hounded. This may account for the vivacity of the opening part of the following dialogue, which, in accordance with my usual habit, I almost immediately transcribed in my note-book.

‘I am charmed to see you looking so well,’ began Blackbeard.

‘It would be too obvious mockery on my part to return your false compliment. There is a feverish fire in those eyes of yours, not for the first time noticed by me, which I should much like to see flash forth in a blaze of illumination. You understand me, Signor Jacopo—I ask pardon—Signor Luigi—’

‘Ha! you have heard my real name, then? Santa Maria! what am I saying?’

‘The truth, by accident, Signor Luigi. Better, much better, be assured, to tell me at once *all* the truth. I myself will strike the key-note. You are one of a gang of rogues, murderers, assassins.’

‘How! what! assassins?’ interrupted Luigi, with passionate accent; ‘assassin! I an assassin!’

‘The arrow, Signor Luigi, may have glanced from its precise mark, but not, perhaps, far wide of it. Come, come, be frank and confidential with me; it will be a safer part, investing a small, very small, stake in a lottery, at the drawing of which Signor Luigi, unless I much deceive myself, will obtain a rich prize. As to Brofferio and Rosco—’

‘Brofferio *and* Rosco!’ interposed Jacopo, with a sardonic grin, and a strong accent upon the conjunction; ‘Brofferio and Rosco: you, Signor, are an agent of the secret police of Turin;

who has worn his mask cleverly. That is admitted. For all that, there are very thin windows which you cannot see through. I have seen through *you* for some time past; so have Brofferio *and* Rosco.'

'That itself, Signor Luigi, remains to be seen. You really know nothing of me, whilst, as to yourself—I having received fresh copies of the papers *stolen from my desk in this room*—and of your friends, I do know something, and am very desirous of knowing more. Are we, or are we not, to be friends, comrades?'

'Friends! friends! comrades!' almost screamed Blackbeard, and with true Italian fervour. 'I will tell you all. For some time I have known it would come to this. Listen, Signor, and with both your ears; I have a strange story to tell.'

'Tell it without guise, without preface, Signor Luigi, and it may be that we shall be trusty comrades and friends.'

'I will, then, without guise or preface, tell you a strange story, make a revelation of strange things. I have it all in my mind.'

SIGNOR LUIGI'S STRANGE STORY.

'Pressed by an irresistible necessity, I am about to reveal—to lay bare a life. I am a native of Venice—Venice, queen of the Adriatic, but reft of her diadem, and to tell the truth, as far as my experience goes, a very muddy, slimy, stagnant

queen of the sea. The Doges, when they wedded her, did not, in my poor judgment, espouse a very beautiful bride. To be sure, I was but a youngster, not more than five years old, when I was carried off in a gondola, next in a fishing smack ; and was finally deposited in a convent of holy Sisters, not far outside of Palermo, in the Island of Sicily.'

'Signor Luigi,' here interrupted I, 'that kind of rigmarole won't go down with me. I was never particularly partial to macaroni when genuine, but chalk and water—'

'Enough, enough, Signor, I understand. I was speaking by rote, having rehearsed the part many times in private, that is understood.'

Was the fellow playing with me ?

'The prologue shall be brief. Brofferio and I were fast friends, and we both loved the same girl—Giuletta. Now to proceed :

'Of the most skilful jugglers Brofferio had, up to a certain time, met with, there was not one he could not imitate and mostly surpass. This was when he and I were young, in the very heyday of youth. He was devoted to such tricks, and possessed a wonderfully imitative faculty in all things, but most strikingly in human voices. I have often heard him repeat or echo what I said with such marvellous exactitude, that I have been not only astonished, but half terrified at hearing myself so reproduced in tone—in fact, any one

knowing me, and not seeing the imitator or living echo, would go before a syndic and conscientiously make oath that it was I, Jacopo, that had been speaking. Fire would not burn that conviction out of him.

‘I regretted,’ continued Jacopo, ‘that my clever friend should devote his talents to what I considered an ignoble pursuit. Giuletta was of the same opinion, and this was, I believe, why she at times manifested a preference—a slight, but sweet delicious preference—for me over him; for, without any affectation or false modesty, I must admit Brofferio to be, as an intellectual man, far superior to me. Brofferio was not jealous of me; not a particle of such a feeling on his part darkened our intercourse. At one time, all of a sudden, he thought of entering the army. Possibly Giuletta’s affectionate indifference towards him—I think that expresses her real feeling—had something to do with his hastily conceived, as hastily abandoned, project. Count Mensdorf, a Bohemian-Austrian, of whom you must have heard—’

‘Certainly I have heard of Count Mensdorf, and that he was foully murdered. Stay for one moment, if you please. You have voluntarily, by no invitation of mine, chosen to place yourself in what may be termed a police-confessional, for it is folly any longer to affect denial with you that I am a “detective” officer, to adopt the English phrase. Weigh your words carefully therefore. One Luigi

is indicated in the papers you have stolen as an accomplice in, if not the actual perpetrator of, the murder of Count Mensdorf. Do not deceive yourself. *Me* you cannot deceive. You rely for safety, no doubt, upon the fact that there is no law of extradition between this country and Austria, or Austrian Italy. Do not count,' I added, 'too surely upon that. Owing to the great influx of foreigners, the English Government have concluded a convention with several continental powers for the instant surrender of criminals, which will have force of law till it is abrogated by the Parliament. Now then, being seriously warned, speak, or do not speak, just as you please. There are circumstances connected with the murder of Mensdorf which do not inspire me with much zeal for the apprehension of the man or men by whom he met his death. Still, under the convention I have spoken of, it really exists; I may be obliged to *act*, and summarily.'

'That is all nonsense, signor. There can be no such convention; and if there were, it would be almost a matter of indifference to Brofferio and myself. Now to continue the thread of my story, which, pardon me, you broke of. The Count Mensdorf and his nephew, Ernest Mensdorf, came to reside in our neighbourhood, it was supposed, for a time only. They located themselves in a château which had for centuries belonged to a noble Italian family, and had been confiscated for

the alleged treason of that family's last representative, Antonio Sapri, now an exile in France.'

'Count Ernest Mensdorf inherited the title from his father, who died in comparative poverty, though once the Austrian ambassador at the court of Berlin.'

'Indeed; I was not aware of that, nor is it of much consequence that I should be. Brofferio was, as I have said, much taken with the varnished villain. He, the Count, was a sort of bastard Cagliostro, clever at tricks of legerdemain, and amused himself by stimulating my credulous friend's passion for that pursuit. Count Ernest, I need hardly say, was an admirer of the *beau sexe*. Brofferio was confident and bold enough to introduce Giuletta to him. He was, of course, struck with her rare loveliness; and she was dazzled with the prestige of his position and his rank, put faith in the plausible pretences by which he beguiled her, verily believed he would make her his countess; and he?—ten thousand curses on him! Bah! words are pitiful weapons to curse or kill with. It's an old story. There fell a star from heaven, its brightness quenched in the ever-yawning gulf of sin and sorrow.'

'I have heard of that sad story. But who was the seducer, the uncle or the nephew? Opinions vary upon that point.'

'That is true, and the reason is simple. The count—the uncle-count, I mean—did admire

Giuletta after a libertine fashion, but he obtained no influence over her, not the slightest, of that I am sure as that I live. That was not the case with my friend Brofferio. His eyes were sealed to the truth. Perhaps Giuletta helped to deceive him. I do not know. Brofferio worked himself into a frenzy of rage, and gave frequent expression to his furious hate and resolve of one day inflicting a signal vengeance. These mad words proved traitors to him, as *you* well know, in the terrible after-time.'

'They were, so far as human judgment could decide, the utterances of a man whose settled purpose it was to carry out his threats at a convenient season. But proceed—I am becoming interested. The Count Mensdorf was found murdered. Giuletta had been, it was proved, with him either at or a little before the time that the crime was committed.'

'Your information is necessarily imperfect. Let *me* tell the story—I who know it word for word, letter by letter.'

'The uncle-count was found murdered, there is no question about that, and Giuletta with her dying breath, declared that she had expected to meet the Count Ernest; that he had made an appointment with her.'

'Yes; but Count Ernest denied that upon his oath before the syndic. And remember that Giuletta stated that the assignation was made in the summer-house of the Villa Nuova when it was quite dark, and that the count spoke to her from a

distance. A wall, a hedge, or other leafy screen—I cannot immediately recall the precise particulars—divided them.’

‘Precisely, and the suggestion was that Brofferio had imitated with the perfection to which I have referred, the count-nephew’s voice. But why, in the name of all the angels or devils, should Brofferio, who believed that the elder Mensdorf was the seducer, seek to lure her to an assignation, by imitating the voice of Count Ernest, and asking her to meet him? When Brofferio was arrested upon suspicion of having murdered Count Mensdorf, it was sought to be proved—well, if you like, it was proved—that he had been seen lurking about, or near, the place of rendezvous. That was admitted by Brofferio himself. True the public prosecutor insisted that the jealous lover, wishing to assure himself beyond all manner of doubt that *Giuletta* had a criminal *liaison* with Count Mensdorf the elder, had induced the unfortunate woman to meet him, when he, Brofferio, could, without much personal risk to himself, assassinate him. But again, there is the insuperable difficulty which, Signor Detective, I wish to impress upon you. Why should Brofferio invite her to meet the uncle-count in the voice of Count Ernest? Why, he believed she cared nothing about him. And if he did not so believe, why did he kill the uncle-count and not the nephew-count?’

‘There is no doubt much difficulty in arriving at the truth in this strangely complicated case—but no question that the weight of evidence inclines strongly towards Brofferio and yourself. But for the present we will not look more closely at that aspect of the question. What is it you wish me to do?’

‘That question is simply answered: to bring to justice, or if not to earthly justice, to earthly shame and ruin, the real murderer, not only of his uncle, but Giuletta—Count Ernest Mensdorf!’

‘Count Ernest Mensdorf?’

‘Yes, Count Ernest Mensdorf, that tiger with a velvet skin, and murderous claw, concealed in satin—’

‘Never mind about velvet skins and tearing claws! Tell me, in plain words, upon what grounds you accuse Count Ernest Mensdorf of having murdered his uncle. This is quite a new suggestion.’

‘True, the wise men of Gotham who took poor Brofferio’s guilt for granted, did not suspect the nephew, notwithstanding that by his relative’s death Count Ernest came into immediate possession of large estates, which, had the uncle-count lived a few weeks—or even days—longer, would never have been his.’

‘Your proof of that?’

‘The proof, the absolute proof, it may be difficult to obtain. With your assistance, however,

that and much more may be done. It is but right,' added Jacopo, with a sly smile, 'that I should hand over your papers. The perusal of them has satisfied us that it will be wise on our part to make you our confidant, and, if possible, our friend. The Signori at head-quarters have forwarded you but confused contradictory instructions,' continued Jacopo; 'but we have gleaned one important fact from them, that Etienne Queroult, the Paris notary, Red Republican, political exile for a time, *intimate companion of Count Ernest*, is now residing at Havre de Grâce.'

'Yes, that was incidentally mentioned. It is wrong, perhaps, to say incidentally; but not much importance appeared to be attached to the circumstance.'

'We saw and understood all that. A gleam of perception must have glanced athwart the foggy brains of the officials. It is, as you say, but casually, carelessly alluded to; but in that allusion is involved the whole pith of the matter. In the papers forwarded, you are fully informed of many minor particulars: for example, as to how I assisted Brofferio to escape and make his way to England. But as to Queroult, through whom alone the mystery can be elucidated, you have no instructions. It is, nevertheless, certain that many influential persons would like to have Count Ernest Mensdorf, *as he calls himself*, upon the hip.'

'As he calls himself! Pray open out your

budget fully. Let there be no reserve. Highly-placed persons would, no doubt, esteem it an essential service if you could effectually trip up the heels of Count Ernest, but that has no reference to the murder of his uncle.'

'I—*we* know all about it. Count Ernest is an influential member of the so-called Rosicrucian brotherhood, who are said—and truly said—to be in close affiliation with the Red Republicans of France. That fact will give us a chance of placing our finger upon the *margot*. Count Ernest has dissolved his connection with the Rosicrucian fraternity since he became a rich man. That is to say, he has striven to break the chain which binds him to the confederacy, and finds it, of course, impossible to do so. But the mere fact that he has sought to emancipate himself from the obligations which he contracted with his Rosicrucian comrades—has, I need not say, brought him into bad odour with his former brethren. Their vengeance is, you know, deadly—and generally *sure*.'

'It is so proclaimed by the occult voices which constantly trumpet forth their dread domination—the omnipresent power of secret societies, and especially of Italian secret societies; but I, for one, have for some time ceased to believe in their boastings. Were there any solid truth in such vaunts, obnoxious kings and kaisers would be allowed short shrift to prepare themselves for another world.'

‘Kings and kaisers are walled in by defences which do not surround real or fictitious counts. But we are talking somewhat wide of the matter to be practically considered. Etienne Queroult, the friend—or, at least, the fraternal acquaintance—of Barbés, is still a great man amongst the Reds, spite of his submission to the actual government of France, by which he obtained a qualified pardon, and was permitted to reënter France. He is, however, relegated to Havre de Grâce, and remains, of course, under the surveillance of the police. Your papers show that. Now, Barbés, with all his extreme opinions, his volcanic temper, and carelessness of human life—is, at bottom, a good fellow enough—’

‘The deuce he is! That is something new.’

‘I mean when his evil passions are not aroused. Now, Barbés can be reached by us, and he must have influence with Queroult; and Queroult, if so minded, could clear Brofferio of the terrible crime with which he is charged, and enable him and me to return to our own country. You,’ added Jacopo, in a tone of deep sadness,—‘you, who have only seen Brofferio as he appears before the world, cannot suspect that the canker of an inconsolable grief—unconsoled as yet, at least—is eating his heart away. The death of Giuletta, an exile from the land where dwell all others whom he has really loved, is fast killing him.’

‘He does not look like a dying man. But let

that pass ; and pray come to the point, which is as obscure to me as ever. I am getting every moment more and more into a state of fog as to what you are driving at.'

'Well, then, will you communicate with headquarters, and inquire whether it is desirable, in their opinion, that you proceed at once to Havre de Grâce? Furnished with a note of introduction from Barbés, which we can procure, and other modes of inducing or compelling Queroult to speak out, you will elicit important, very important, revelations, not solely pertaining to the murder of the Count Mensdorf. And my life upon it, the answer will be that you embark for Havre without delay.'

I was sceptical as to that ; but Jacopo spoke with such apparent earnestness and sincerity, and from the secret liking I had conceived for the possibly grossly-wronged prestidigitateur, I promised to write without delay. I did so ; and, to my great astonishment, received instructions not to lose an hour in prosecuting with the utmost vigilance and energy the business opened up to me by Jacopo or Luigi. Pregnant hints for my guidance, when in communication with Queroult, were subjoined. I forthwith sent for Jacopo, who was rejoiced beyond measure at the news ; brought me a short time afterwards a paper purporting to be signed by Barbés—how procured I did not inquire—kept me up half the night cramming me

with instructions as to how I should hoodwink and insinuate myself into Queroult's confidence; and on the following day I embarked at Southampton in the steamer for Havre de Grâce.

My wife and child went with me, as it was very probable my stay in France would be a prolonged one. The authorities at Turin had meanwhile communicated with the French Government; so that, upon arriving in the commercial capital of maritime Normandy, I found myself in intimate confidential *rappport* with the Havre police. So far, well. I was entering on a difficult and dangerous campaign; but I was well supplied with the sinews of war—money. I had received a draft from Turin of such an amount as was unmistakable proof of the interest felt in my success by the authorities there; in addition to which a considerable sum was pressed upon me by Jacopo. Certainly I did not require *much* pressing, seeing I was about to expend it in furtherance of his and Brofferio's views and purposes. The purse was furnished by the prestidigitateur, who was gaining large sums by his performances. These performances must be remembered by hundreds of London sight-seers. I doubt whether the Davenport Brothers, or the Wizard of the North, have been more successful in bamboozling the public than was the conjurer whom I call Signor Brofferio.

It was easy to find Etienne Queroult. He lodged in a rather mean-looking roomy house at

the quay end of a street, the name of which I forget, running at a right angle from the Rue St. Jacques. A remarkable man was Etienne Queroult. One could see that at a glance. I guessed his age at fifty, but afterwards knew that the snows of more than sixty winters had passed over his thin locks and bald^d defiant brow and forehead. I have never met with a man who combined such a sensuous intellectualism with such an utter absence of all moral principle. Cynic and *gourmet*, he was at once a child of Voltaire and Epicurus. He had one deficiency rarely to be found in Frenchmen—he had no animal courage, in fact, was a thorough craven. This Jacopo had intimated to me, and that particular item of knowledge was one of the elements upon which I counted for achieving success.

I presented my letter of introduction. M. Queroult examined both it and me with searching inquisition before he spoke. He appeared to be satisfied. ‘From my excellent friend, Barbés, and countersigned by J. F.’ [These two initial letters formed a sort of hieroglyph in a corner of the paper.] ‘From my excellent friend, Barbés,’ repeated Queroult, still with his vulpine glance fixed now upon me, now upon the paper, ‘and countersigned by J. F. It is an unexceptionable certificate of character, Signor Feretti. You are, it would appear, one of the reddest of the Reds, and your fidelity has stood the test of rude trials. It is well. What

do you require of me, Signor Feretti?' asked the man sharply. 'Not money, I hope.'

'I require nothing of you, M. Queroult, but friendship, when you shall have known me long enough to believe I deserve it; and for the present, fraternal counsel and sympathy.'

'Cheap commodities those, Signor Feretti, to which you are heartily welcome,' said the man, with a hard rasping laugh, 'heartily welcome. As to what,' he added, 'do you require counsel?'

'I am a foreigner and a fugitive. I require refuge, concealment for a time. Could I lodge with you? I mean here. Could I have an apartment in this house?'

Again the scrutinising serpent look.

'Holy blue! yes, there is a room to let. I am propriétaire—that is, I rent the house, and sublet it in single rooms, only single rooms, and to bachelors, widowers, men who have no encumbrances. The rent will be five francs per week. Can you pay so much weekly in advance?'

'Yes, to be sure of privacy and protection.'

'Privacy! That in an absolute sense I cannot assure for myself. I am, as I daresay you know very well, under the surveillance of Messieurs the Police. They have a right, which, blue death, they quite often enough exercise—to at all hours penetrate into and examine my domicile from garret to cellar. They will desire to know all about *you*. What shall we say? Let us see.

Have you not something of *l'air marin*? It strikes me so. Suppose we say you are a seafaring man, in hope of obtaining a berth in this busy port. You approve of that? Let it be so, then; come at once. As to the ulterior purposes or designs which—or I have lost my wonted skill in reading men—are seething, fermenting in that Italian brain, we shall have time enough to discuss *them*. Yes, come to-night; I am lonely, and shall be glad of your companionship.'

My introduction to M. Queroult had been easily effected. The work before me was how to turn Queroult's favourable opinion of me and my domestication under the same roof with him to account. There were, I knew well, important issues involved; and it behoved me to be wary as vigilant—I *was* both!

I soon made discoveries: one that M. Queroult was an inveterate gambler, that he was alternately rich and poor, flush of money, and needy in the extreme. He received large drafts from Count Ernest Mensdorf—that the Havre police easily ascertained; but the proceeds were dissipated, lost often in a few hours after the money reached him. Queroult had also a habit of talking, when excited, to himself, not very loudly, but sufficiently so for one who, like me, had a sensitive ear, was eagerly attentive, and at no great distance off. Disjointed fragments, scraps of murmured soliloquy, combined with the knowledge I possessed,

convinced me that Count Ernest Mensdorf was in his (Queroult's) power, and very restive under the yoke. If the expected draft failed to arrive in due time, and Queroult could not consequently betake himself to the fashionable gaming-house in the Rue de Paris, where he had already been pillaged of immense sums, which he believed, with the infatuation of all inveterate gamblers, he should one fortunate night regain with heaped-up measure, his passion boiled over, found vent in explosive ebullitions, such as, 'Ha, ha! I am too exacting, am I? Death of my life, he shall find that the executioner is *more* exacting! He cannot supply me; I squander immense sums, do I? True, though the devil said it. Yes; but I shall recover it all if this impostor, this assassin, does not balk me. He shall not balk me; the money is not his, the scélérat; it is mine—mine—for his life is mine. Yes, his life—his life! Ha, ha! A terrible gage of battle that, Monsieur le soi-disant Comte? Better not provoke me too far! *Cave canem*, the dog has fatal fangs, which he will make use of if provoked. Blue death, yes!'

I do not mean that these expressions were made use of consecutively as I have penned them, or at one time. That was not the case. I cull them from some half-dozen soliloquies which I continued to overhear. I was much puzzled how to act—I mean in a decisive sense. The situation was a perplexing one. Queroult, I was sure

regarded me with, as I may so express myself, indefinite distrust. This I knew from his reticence whenever I, rashly perhaps relying upon the surreptitious instructions I had been favoured with by Jacopo, ventured to allude to the organisation of our society. This I of course did with the view to finding a chance of obtaining a favourable natural opening for the introduction of the Count Ernest's name. No such chance was afforded; I could only watch and wait. One additional source of embarrassment was the presence of my wife in Havre de Grâce. The bringing her there was a gross imprudence. I could not introduce her to Queroult. Exposed to the sly questioning of Queroult she would have unconsciously betrayed me in five minutes. Knowing instinctively—knowing, that is to say, without tangible bodily evidence, that my every outgoing was watched by some one of the Red fraternity with whom Queroult was in constant communication, I could only address Marietta by letter, and that, the only one I dared write, advised her to take lodgings at the Hotel de France under the name of Madame Lacroix, and place herself under the direction of the Chief Commissary of Police, M. Constant. She would then, I knew, be securely shielded from harm. Altogether I managed pretty well in hushing Queroult's lynx-eyed suspicions for about six weeks, a very weary time, but patience had its reward, as patience usually does.

It was necessary to get M. Queroult into my power—into police power I mean. This was the puzzle: twenty schemes were hatched in my brain, but all died before maturity. I was beginning to despair, when light suddenly flashed through the haze. Queroult had been fuming and fretting for some nine or ten days at the non-receipt of remittances. I had lent him a rouleau of twenty napoleons, which had very speedily gone to the devil's exchequer. One morning when his ill-humour was at the highest, he received a post letter, which he eagerly tore open, I being present. There was no enclosure, no draft. I could see that, and his countenance darkened fiendishly. Presently it brightened.

‘Ha, he is coming to-night, this grand count. It is well; excellent! Thunder of heaven! I shall have him now! Ha, ha! it is excellent!’

‘What count do you expect to-night?’ I asked.

He started with surprise, and his pale bloodless face crimsoned slightly.

‘You here, Signor Feretti! I had forgotten. Yes, a count, and friend of mine, will be here this evening. I shall be able to return the twenty napoleons you have lent me.’

Remarking that he need not hurry himself for that, I left the room. There could be no doubt that the count expected was Count Ernest Mensdorf. If I could only be an unseen ear-witness at their conference my mission would in all probabi-

lity be substantially accomplished. But how to do that? It could only be done in one way. A roomy, but dark closet, adjoined M. Queroult's sitting-room. A small window at the top of the plaster partition might be opened from the inside. It was a lumber closet, and was always kept locked. Could I obtain, unobserved, access there, the thing would be done. It would be difficult to do so quietly. It would be necessary to softly pick the lock of the door; but I had no picklocks. It was absolutely necessary to obtain them. The police could supply me; but how let them know what I required? I wrote out the full particulars, and thought of sauntering out, and when meeting with an officer to slip it into his hand unnoticed by the spy, if one were watching me. This was a hazardous experiment. Were I seen in private communication with Messieurs the Police I should be forthwith ejected from M. Queroult's premises. Fortunately a less risky expedient presented itself. I had finished my writing, and was hesitating how to proceed, when, looking from my chamber-window, I saw a gendarme coming down the street from the quay end, and he would consequently pass close under me. He will look up at the house; of course he would, when the proprietor was under surveillance. I at once decided how to act. I wrapped in paper a two-sous piece, and gently opening the window, caught the gendarme's eye, and dropped the paper at his feet. He picked it

up, placed it in his pocket, and passed on. So far well. Less than an hour afterwards there was a visit of surveillance by the police, one of whom contrived to hand me a number of picklocks, that skilfully used, would open all the doors and desks in Christendom. I was armed. •

The lock yielded readily. Should the Count Ernest Mensdorf arrive, I should be practically present at their *entretien*. That point was secured. It was a tedious waiting time. Etienne Queroult himself was savagely impatient; fumed, fretted, paced his room like a hungry tiger, muttering the while fierce threats, which, incoherent as they were, I could pretty well interpret. At last a fiacre drove up, there was a thundering rattat at the door, and the Count Ernest Mensdorf, tramping up the stairs, entered the room, and bowed haughtily, with the air of a Grand Seigneur, to Queroult! That assumption did not, I saw, in the least impose upon the Frenchman, and the habitual sneer upon his face became more cynical as his menacing mocking eyes looked hard into those of the Count, and he said,

‘Welcome, M. le Comte!’ (I took instant note of the *mocqueur* tone in which Queroult emphasised the word Comte.) ‘Welcome, M. le Comte! You have not arrived too soon.’

M. le Comte seated himself without reply, and the following dialogue, which I carefully took note of, followed. I will put it in dramatic fashion :

Queroult : ' And now, M. le Comte, being here face to face, are we to arrive at a definite satisfactory arrangement—satisfactory to me, I mean ?'

Le Comte : ' That depends, M. Queroult. But *primò* ! Can we confer together without the *possibility* of being overheard ?'

Queroult : ' Without doubt. Speak out. There is no ear but mine which your words will reach. And I hope those words will be to the purpose.'

Le Comte : ' I hope so too. In the first place, to be candid—I cannot continue to supply a purse which is empty as soon as filled.'

Queroult : ' I hear; and you think whilst scantily supplying mine to keep your own well filled? It is delicious, that! I that know—you understand,'

Le Comte : ' You know, you know ! That is the cuckoo note which, with insolent variations, you are always dinning into my ears. I am weary of the tune.'

Queroult : ' *Sacré blue* ! that is easily understood. Still, M. le Comte, that cuckoo note would be melodious music compared with the voice of the president of the Court of First Instance condemning to death Stephen Bergamo, falsely called Count Ernest Mensdorf.'

Le Comte : ' Enough, enough ! It is unnecessary that you and I should hold mirrors up to each other's souls. We know each other.'

Let that suffice. I bring with me forty thousand francs.'

Queroult : 'Forty thousand francs ! That is something ; but a mere bagatelle when counted against the Mensdorf estates, which estates, M. le Comte,' added Queroult, with malignant snapping of his yellow teeth, 'which estates, M. le Comte has, I find, advertised for sale.'

Le Comte : 'They are sold, and these forty thousand francs is the deposit money. Now, Queroult, let us be reasonable. You have had of me three hundred thousand odd francs. The vastness of the sum makes one's hair stand on end. Well, the estates are gone, or will go, for less, much less, than half their value. Suspicion floats in the air. One capitalist has been found to take the risk. Inquiry is to be made of you.'

Queroult : 'To be sure, to be sure. That I have taken care shall be indispensable,' said Queroult, rubbing his hands gleefully. 'Blue death ! I should have been an idiot not to have done so.'

Le Comte : 'Now, then, to finish, conclude a final bargain. I now present you with forty thousand francs. I will further guarantee you, in writing, two hundred thousand francs upon the completion of the purchase. This is lavish payment merely for silence.'

Queroult : 'I accept ; but upon this condition, that I ~~am~~ present when the purchase-money is to be paid, and receive my quota there and then.'

Le Comte : 'That is but fair. But let me tell you that it may be quite two months before the sale is completed, and that I cannot possibly send you any more money till the sale of the property has been concluded.'

Queroult : 'Two months ! It is a long time. However, I shall be able to wait. Only, M. le Comte,' added Queroult, 'do not attempt to juggle with me. You are, I know, as clever a conjurer as Brofferio. Only do not attempt to play tricks with *me*. It would be unwise to do so—very unwise.'

Le Comte : 'I shall not attempt to do so. It is a bargain, then.'

Queroult : 'Yes ; conditionally. You walk upon a slippery floor, M. le Comte. A very slight unfriendly push would be fatal. Let that consideration never be absent from your mind.'

Nothing more of significance passed between the two worthies, and the 'count' a few minutes afterwards left. Queroult followed almost immediately. He did not return until morning dawned. I was wakeful and restless that night. The dialogue between Queroult and the 'count' had excited me, indicating as it did a labyrinth of crime, but furnishing no distinct clue to its unravelment. Stephen Bergamo ! that was a name which sounded familiarly to my ear. Was it not a Bergamo that was suspected of a terrible crime committed in Genoa, and who had fled from

justice? Could this man be he? If so, the solicitude of the Turin authorities was easily accounted for.

Queroult sent me a message about noon. He was just up and wished to speak with me. He was in a terrific rage, suffering under what may be termed moral delirium tremens. He had positively lost all the forty thousand francs except the twenty napoleons which he had repaid me. He told me so in a few disjointed sentences.

'Signor Feretti,' he added, 'will you relend me those napoleons? Luck is, I feel convinced, upon the very point of turning.'

I instantly saw my opportunity.

'Yes,' said I, 'twenty napoleons. If you lose them I can afford to wait. There are many more in my room.'

The man's eyes sparkled with fiercer light than before. He thanked me warmly, left the house at his usual hour, and came back, as usual, coinless. He asked me to lend him another rouleau. He proposed at once returning to the gaming house to obtain his revenge. The old, old story! This time he felt quite sure of recouping himself. I politely declined acceding to his request, under the plea that I should, in a few days more or less, require all I had for an urgent purpose, and it might be some time before I should obtain a fresh supply.' The furious impatient gambler favoured me with a tiger-glance, as if about to spring at my

throat. He struggled with his rage, conquered its outward manifestations, sank into a chair, and covering his face with his hands, remained perfectly still and silent whilst I was in the room, which was not long. In a quarter of an hour I returned to his apartment equipped for travelling, with a small carpet-bag in my hand. He looked at me with surprise and curiosity.

‘I am really much chagrined,’ said I, ‘to refuse your very moderate request, but I have no choice. I am about,’ I continued, ‘to pay a flying visit to a friend at Monvillier. I can easily hire a vehicle to convey me there, and shall be absent about three days—not less than that. I hope by then to hear that your friend, Count Mensdorf, has sent a remittance.’

‘It is late—past nine o’clock—to set out for Monvillier, a distance of three leagues. May I ask whom you know there, and if you are expected?’

‘I am expected there, and expected to arrive late this evening, by one, Signor Bensa—a countryman and friend of mine. I received an invitation from him by post four days ago.’

‘The Signor Bensa’s wife or daughter you must mean, for the address on the letter was certainly in a female hand. I took the letter in you may remember.’

‘Of course I do. It *was* written by Signor Bensa’s daughter.’

This was a professional falsehood. The letter was from my wife.

‘And the post-mark was Ingouville,’ remarked my acutely suspicious friend.

‘Ah, yes; a friend of Signor Bensa was coming to Havre, and intended to deliver the letter in person. Something must have prevented him doing so, and he posted it at Ingouville. I had better leave you the key of my chamber. I may, if my stay should be prolonged, be obliged to trespass upon your complaisance to send me some extra things, as I take but two changes of linen with me.’

The hook was swallowed at once.

‘Yes—yes, to be sure; leave the key. I will attend to any request you may make with pleasure. You are certain not to return in *less* than three days?’

‘O, yes; quite certain. I *may* be absent a whole week.’

‘Ha! You start from the *Messageries*, I presume?’

‘That is my intention. I shall have no difficulty there in obtaining a conveyance?’

‘Certainly not. You will be at Monvillier in two hours at most. Adieu, Signor. Bon voyage.’

I did go to the *Messageries*; as I thought it quite probable, notwithstanding my sudden de-

parture, I might be watched by one of my Red Republican friend's colleagues. That did not happen to be the case. I entered the office of the *Messageries*, made some business inquiries of the principal clerk, and pretty well satisfied I was unobserved, retraced my steps to the corner of the Douane, or Custom House, from which I could watch my landlord's exit from his house.

The place where I stood was completely in shadow, but there was a gas street-lamp not five yards from Lamont's door. Lamont, the police had told me, was, they had reason to believe, the man's true, original name. I could not, therefore miss seeing him when he emerged into the street. Now, I had not been away more than ten minutes in all; that time and more would be required to finally make up his mind to borrow my rouleaux. Should he leave the house and take the direction of the Rue de Paris, I should feel quite sure he had my napoleons, and the game would be in my own hands. The minutes passed wearily. Half an hour was gone—at least, I in my fretful impatience, so believed—before Lamont made his appearance. His face was deathly pale—the pallor of fear, of guilt and greed. I saw his features distinctly, though only for one moment, as he glanced furtively round, half fearful, perhaps of seeing me. Knowing that I could put my hand on the gentleman at any moment, I thought it would be well to make perfectly sure that he had

appropriated my gold. This was easily done, and all doubt was at an end. Clever Lamont had fallen headlong into the snare.

Still I had a delicate and difficult game to play. Were I to inform the French police that Lamont had robbed me, his hour for a ghastly fate would have struck. He would infallibly be condemned to the Bagne, or galleys, for life—an existence compared with which the sharp brief pang of death by the guillotine is mercy—and my purpose would be frustrated, my mission defeated. Consigned to despair he would be as dumb as death. The knowledge, however, that by a word I could send him to that living sepulchre, the Bagne, would compel his confidence. There *could* be no question of that.

It was nearly half-past ten when I gained the portico of the great Havre hell. Gaming-houses in France and on the Continent of Europe generally, are like the dens of a grosser, if not more hurtful, vice—privileged, licensed establishments. The doors are wide open. All who have money in their purses, and are decorously dressed, are welcome there. I ascended the splendid stairs with a quick hilarious step, and presently found myself in a gorgeously furnished apartment, in which *le jeu d'enfer* was being carried on with breathless eagerness by sixty or seventy well-dressed men. There were also seven or eight fashionably-dressed ladies present. The glare of

light so dazzled me for a few minutes that I did not discern my friend Lamont amongst the excited throng. Presently I saw him. He was at the roulette-table, and staking my napoleons recklessly. I watched him for a brief space, considering that it would be only prudent to recover as many of those gold pieces as possible.

I pushed my way to his side, pressed his arm, and whispered, 'Friend Lamont, I must have a word with you.' He started as if a serpent stung him; then shook as with a tertian ague, and I thought would have swooned outright. 'Do not let us have a scene here, for your sake,' I said *sotto voce* in his ear. 'All may be well, so far as you are concerned. Let me take your arm. Come!'

He recovered his ordinary self-command as we walked homeward, but said little till we were alone together in his sitting-room and he had locked the door. The movement, under the circumstances, was a suspicious one, and I drew forth a revolver.

'It would be folly on your part, M. Lamont, to gamble with your life. Your position, so far as I am concerned, is not, as I hinted in the *salon de jeu*, at all a desperate one. In truth, I am quite sure that it depends only upon yourself to improve it greatly. At the same time, to be perfectly frank with you, unless you do furnish me with the information I require, and with evidence

to establish the truth of that information, I shall inform messieurs les gendarmes of to-night's little incident. You know what that means ?

'I do ; but I solemnly protest that I did not mean to rob you. Luck was turning in my favour when you interrupted the game, and I have no doubt that by the morning I should have been able to replace your gold, and have plenty of my own in my pocket. As to locking the door, that was simply a precaution to prevent intrusion till we come to an arrangement. Malediction upon me,' he added, with angry bitterness, 'malediction upon me, for a veritable ass, in suffering myself to fall into such a trap ; I too, that felt instinctively the first time I saw you that I was menaced by a great though unknown danger ! And now let me know the worst. I am not, you hint, the fly which you and others have woven this web to enmesh. That I readily believe. Who, then, am I to betray, to denounce ?'

'You are asked to denounce the assassin of Count Mensdorf.'

'Ha ! What is that ?' exclaimed the man, springing to his feet in uncontrollable surprise and agitation. 'The assassin of Count Mensdorf ! Why, that assassin escaped the hands of justice with the help of a confederate, and both, I hear, are now in London, one, the actual assassin, supporting himself and accomplice by clever jugglery'.

'That story won't pass, M. Lamont. No one

knows better; no one, except the murderer himself, knows so well as you that poor Brofferio is as innocent of the crime as I myself. And how does it happen,' I added quietly, 'that Count Ernest Mensdorf, as he calls himself, but whose real name is Bergamo, transmits M. Lamont such heavy money drafts? He does not bear the character of a gratuitously generous man.'

Lamont was once more aghast—dumbfounded. I repeated the question with sterner emphasis. He felt himself to be on the brink of a black abyss, into which a word of mine would in one moment plunge him.

'You suspect,' he said, in low tremulous tones,—'you suspect Count Ernest of having murdered his uncle?'

'No; let us be exact. We believe he murdered the Count Mensdorf, not his uncle; we believe also that you were cognisant of the crime after its perpetration. Decide at once, M. Lamont. You stand upon a mine which may at any moment explode and hurl you to destruction. There are others besides myself upon the track. You have one chance—a last one, which must be seized at once or it will be gone for ever. The alternative is simple—direct: the scaffold for the soi-disant Count Ernest, or the galleys for life for M. Lamont.'

There was a fierce conflict going on in Lamont's mind. This was seen in the working of his mo-

bile features and his short, quick, spasmodic breathing. Should he denounce the count he would lose a wealthy client, from whom he could always squeeze gold. But the gold of Cræsus would be valueless to a felon condemned to penal labour for life. How he must have cursed me in his heart! It was well I held a fully-charged revolver in my right hand, Lamont not knowing that the French police and I were in occult connection. The struggle, which I knew could only end one way, lasted some time. I rose to my feet.

‘You *will* then compel me, M. Lamont, to call in the Havre gendarmes, and make them acquainted with the little peccadillo you ventured upon to-night? You make a strange choice; but that is your affair.’

‘Stay, stay! I have no choice. But, if I do—if it should be in my power to—to enable you to accomplish the object in view, how is my own position to be improved, as you intimated it would be?’

‘That question is easily answered. The family who, as I understand, will inherit the Mensdorf estates, if the devise to the supposed nephew can be set aside, will, I am quite sure, not be ungrateful in a pecuniary sense.’

‘You mean the Laval family? It is half-German, half-Lombard. Madame Laval has a high name. Well, each one for himself. The Count

Ernest, so called, killed his reputed uncle, who but the day previously had discovered that his true nephew, the real count, whom he had never seen, had died in the East, where he had been a traveller for some years. Bergamo was his tutor and intimate friend. The count, remember, who had been an orphan since he was eight years old, had neither brother, sister, nor relative to whom he was personally known. The young man was himself of a shy, taciturn, retired disposition; had formed but few acquaintances in Europe; and there was a striking resemblance personally between him and his tutor. These concurrent circumstances tempted the tutor to pass himself off upon the elder Count Mensdorf, who had written to his nephew soliciting his return to Europe, offering him home, wealth, and a high position. The young count's scanty inheritance was well-nigh gone when these letters reached him, and he had written to say that he would shortly accept the uncle's invitation. Any one who believes in Satan and Satanic agency would really be inclined to believe that the Evil One, desirous of seizing the tutor's soul—'

'This is not a time, M. Lamont, to indulge in nonsense. Go on with your narrative, and wander as little as may be from the essential points.'

'Sharply rebuked, Signor Feretti, if that be your name. I was saying, or about to say, that the devil had gone out of his way to lay temptation

in that of the tutor. At the time the young count was about to write his acceptance of the uncle's invitation, he received an injury in the right hand, which incapacitated him from holding a pen for a considerable time, during which the tutor wrote all his letters—at the dictation of the count, of course—and subscribed them as if they were autographs of the nephew's, Ernest Mensdorf. Morbleu! everything conspired to place the count's coronet upon the tutor's brow. The young nobleman died, as I have said, suddenly, but his papers and other effects were naturally possessed by Bergamo; and he, seeing a glittering prize within reach, stretched forth his hand to seize it. Very natural that, it seems to me. *Sacré bleu!* we are all fallible, except the Pope. *Eh bien,* Bergamo wrote at once to say he was coming home. The letter was in the same hand, sealed with the same impress—how, then, could the uncle doubt its authenticity? There are no necrologies, no newspapers, published in Armenia. The cards held by Bergamo were promising ones, and he played them with skill and audacity. The old count was thoroughly deceived; the adroit nephew became a favourite with him, and he made a will entirely in favour of the supposed nephew. In subscribing that document he signed his death-warrant. Discovery of the cheat might take place at any moment. The adverse chances were many. The count in his grave, the nephew's game would

be triumphantly played out—that is to say, he would have time enough to gather together, secure the stakes, and quickly disappear from the scene. But the pseudo-count, though an audacious player when strongly tempted, is essentially a weak man. He always fails at the decisive crisis. He should not have hesitated. The situation achieved, he should have struck the decisive stroke at once—’

‘You mean that he should have murdered the Count Mensdorf at once, without delay? That is cool, certainly. You were not, I believe, of his counsel at what you call the decisive crisis?’

‘No; I did not make the personal acquaintance of the Count Ernest till about a month before the death of his uncle. I presented myself to him as one of the brotherhood. He received me in a brotherly manner. I acquired his confidence, to a certain extent. He had been wasting his time dallying with pretty puppets: one of them, a *Giuletta*, interested even me.’ She perished lamentably. But these are the accidents of life. •

‘I know all about *Giuletta*. Pray explain how you came to know that the pretended Count Ernest had been the true count’s tutor?’

‘By the merest chance; a notary of Vienna, of the name of Vonberg, had had some monetary transaction with Count Ernest’s father, whom he asserted to be in his debt. I doubted that, for several reasons, one being that Vonberg was a needy man. Well, Vonberg hearing that the son

of his real, or pretended debtor, was the acknowledged heir of the rich Count Mensdorf, took the trouble to appeal to the honour of the son of his alleged debtor. When he saw Vonberg in the grounds, he had just come in at the chief entrance, that is, I supposed he had just come in. This was not so, he had met the Count Mensdorf some quarter of an hour previously, and appointed to see him again as soon as he, Vonberg, had had a brief interview with the nephew. Perhaps some latent suspicion of the truth, was brooding in the uncle's brain. The instant Vonberg and the false count met, the farce was finished, so far as we three were concerned. Bergamo himself was utterly confounded, white as a sheet, and trembling, unnerved as a man about to mount the scaffold. I saw at once that there was an opportunity for a transaction. It was not difficult to effect an arrangement; the Sieur Vonberg was frankly open to a bargain; the Count Ernest had abundance of cash at command, and the affair was, as we believed, finished, for a sufficient time at least. We were mistaken. The old count had overheard, or partially overheard, our arrangements. He intercepted Vonberg, drew from him all he knew. The castle of cards fell to pieces, but the Count Mensdorf did not confront and expose the impostor. My opinion is, that Bergamo was beloved by Count Mensdorf; that the ligature of affection woven by his intercourse with the

young man could not be easily broken without pain, great pain, to himself. He said nothing; but his resolve was taken. Bergamo was informed, by whom I know not, that instructions had been given to prepare a new will. In a few days the false count would have been driven away with ignominy, though not, it may be presumed, without the means of maintenance. To linger or hesitate would have been insanity. Bergamo so contrived the catastrophe by certain manœuvres, that suspicion should not attach to himself.'

'No; but to poor Brofferio,' I interrupted, with emotion.

'Yes; but self—self is the shrine at which men, all men and women too, worship in the fervency of a real devotion.'

'Did you witness the murder of the Count Mensdorf by his pretended nephew?'

'I did; he, Bergamo, not knowing that I had stealthily dogged his steps.'

'Enough; you must leave for Italy with me at early morning.'

'You forget, Signor Feretti, that I am under surveillance—forbidden to leave Havre de Grâce.'

'Nonsense! I will arrange that in two minutes.'

'Ha! are you so hand-in-glove with the authorities as that? What a fool I am to ask the question after what has passed! Well, I will be ready. Permit me, Signor Feretti,' said Lamoignon,

as I was about to leave the room, 'permit me, Signor Feretti, a few words. The abhorrent indignation which you manifested just now, excited by the belief that the unfortunate prestidigitateur would have by our contrivance suffered on the scaffold, in order that the real assassin might escape, is severely unjust towards me. His infernal majesty is not, some say, quite so black as he is painted. The same with me; though often called, and with some truth, a veritable slip of Satan, I would not have permitted the execution of Brofferio. The Count Ernest knew this well, otherwise the escape of the accused would not have been so easily, if at all, effected. Jacopo's zeal would have failed to liberate his friend but for the secret aid afforded by Count Ernest.'

'I can believe that. Good-night. Be stirring early.'

The assassin Bergamo was arrested in the very nick of time, and when his heart was merry within him. He required but about forty-eight hours' longer grace to place himself beyond the reach of man's justice. It is always upon the last turn of the dice that the devil wins his prize, and those hours of grace were not vouchsafed to him. He at once gave up the game of life as lost. He went into his dressing-room, ostensibly for the purpose of fittingly attiring himself. He was in his morning *déshabillé* when suddenly pounced upon, and

two minutes afterwards was a corpse. He had taken care to provide himself with a deadly poison, knowing, as he did, that the sword of a Nemesis was constantly suspended over his head by a single hair, which a word from Lamont could sever.

CHAPTER VII.

THE JEWELLER OF PORTA DEL PO.

TURIN was, in sad truth, a city of confusion. The surrender of Milan by Carlo Alberto had maddened the Lombards, who believed themselves betrayed by a monarch whose real sympathies were with kings, not peoples, and whose master-motive was in any case to preserve his own petty crown. Carlo Alberto, forced to accept a duel with the colossal power of Austria, and indisposed to make the cause a national one by inviting Italy to crowd *en masse* round his standard, fearing, perhaps, that the Republican tricolour would speedily displace the banner of Savoy, found himself, with his forty thousand Piedmontese, utterly incapable of continuing the unequal contest, and fell rapidly back to the safety of his own territory, which he well knew France and England would not permit to be wrested from him. Still the bloody fatal battle of Novara (March 1849) is proof that Carlo Alberto was no traitor in the ordinary sense of the word. Turin would, as the world knows, have been occupied by Radetsky's victorious hosts but for the intervention of the representatives of France and England. The imbro-

glio was at its height when Carlo Alberto abdicated the crown, and Victor Emmanuel reigned in his stead.

This being the political state of Turin, it may be imagined what its domestic condition must have been, with the bonds of authority rudely loosened, if not snapped defiantly asunder, with the royal and municipal administrations for many days in a state of chaos, subordinates not knowing whom to obey or how to act. The social foundations of the noble city were broken up, and from the lowest depths there surged upwards a flood of vice which the directors of the bewildered disorganised public force were, for some eight or ten days, utterly incompetent to stem. Fortunately some few of the chief civil functionaries did not lose their heads, and amongst these was Signor Pinelli. Besides keeping his old staff of officers well in hand, he organised a temporary brigade of about two hundred men, one subdivision of which he placed under my orders. This was a great honour, considering the comparatively short time I had been engaged. We worked night and day, and were almost worn off our legs; but order gradually replaced anarchy. The city scum was swept from the streets into the prisons, or summarily chastised, and the noble city of Turin resumed its orderly patrician aspect.

It was during this exceptional state of things that I met with an adventure that was the parent

of many others, and left a mark upon my life which time will never efface. In the Porta del Po, one of the most fashionable business streets in Turin, there are several jewellers' shops which might seem to vie in costly luxurious display with the great establishments of the kind in London or Paris. The proprietor of one of these was a Frenchman, Napoleon Leverrier, of Paris. He was *bon enfant*, as the French say, if ever one existed: a rather tall, very merry, rotund, handsome-faced man, whose dark gray eyes were ever sparkling with gay good-humour. He had married a Turinese, whose remarkable beauty was her only dower; but when I knew him he had been for some years a widower. The sole offspring of the marriage—a very happy one, people said—was one daughter, christened Adriana, after her mother—she was Adrienne, naturally, to her French father. She was a most charming girl, just verging upon womanhood—Italian womanhood—of which the glowing tints were beginning to flush with a warmer beauty the delicate hues of her spring-time loveliness. No, I have not seen, not even in this London, a girl-woman of such exquisite loveliness and grace as Adrienne Leverrier. She much resembled a portrait once I saw in Fleet-street when I first came to England of a Lady Constance Gower. For that reason I have paused a hundred times when passing to gaze upon the striking resemblance. Still it was but

the shadow, the bright shadow, of Adrienno Leverrier. My sister Francesca, in the fresh young morning of her life, was not so beautiful. I am an enthusiastic admirer of beauty in women; it is a passion with me—a purifying passion, I dare aver, not a sensuous one; very far indeed from that.

In the beauteous temple was enshrined as beautiful a soul. Can one wonder that Adrienne Leverrier was the idol of her father, a man of strong feeling and singularly imaginative? Very highly respected was Napoleon Leverrier—not so much on account of his wealth, but for his hearty generous nature, his strict integrity, and enlivening social mirth. He was the only foreigner I ever knew (he had been formally naturalised, of course) who was elected a member of the *Corpo Decurionale* (municipal council). He was one of the *Syndics*. No doubt his Italian marriage had to a certain extent influenced the nomination.

M. Leverrier's house, one of the new, rather pretentious brick edifices dressed with stone, now common in Torino, or Turin—the city's Frenchified name—was much too large for the requirements of his family; and a great portion of the upper part was let off, very handsomely furnished, sometimes altogether, sometimes in separate apartments. The lodgers were generally French persons, which could excite no surprise; our Gallic neighbours would naturally prefer taking up their temporary abode with a countryman.

When the turbulent anarchy consequent upon the disaster of Novara and hurried change of government occurred, there were domiciled temporarily at M. Leverrier's, a French family from Paris, the head of which, a M. Mozard, had some claim, as a cork contractor, against the Piedmontese Government, the settlement of which, he thought, might be facilitated by his presence in Turin. He had his wife, a son, and two grown-up daughters with him.

The floor above theirs had been engaged by the Vicomte de Beauregard—that was the name on his card. There is not, I believe, any authentic printed list of the French nobility—the facility, consequently, of assuming a French title tempts to the perpetration of gross frauds, there being, spite of Juliet's poetic denial, much in a name all over the civilised world. M. Leverrier knew that as well as I did, or better, but he was fascinated by M. le Vicomte de Beauregard, who, like the jeweller, was an enthusiastic admirer of Le Grand Napoleon, and seemed never weary of dilating upon the glory of the great man and that of his world-shaking armies. He, the Vicomte, had also served, but there being no immediate prospect of war, and, having come into his large inheritance, M. le Vicomte determined to become for a time a *courrier d'aventure*, to sow his wild oats over as wide and beautiful a portion of the earth as possible, previous to returning and settling down for

life at his principal estate at Languedoc, with much more to the same old tune; which, however, seldom fails to charm and lull hearts intellectually asleep, when the variations are skilfully adapted to the hearer's taste.

In saying this I am but the mere echo of M. Leverrier—of M. Leverrier with his eyes open, his ears disenchanted, I myself having seen the Vicomte twice before he left Turin, and but briefly, cursorily, upon each occasion. The first time was at a pretty village, a few miles out of Turin, where M. Leverrier had a charming little property, abutting on the Po. It was the 15th of August, and a rustic *fête* was being held in honour of the Holy Virgin; M. Leverrier, his daughter, M. le Vicomte de Beauregard, M. Mozard, with daughters and son, and a half-dozen or so of other friends of M. Leverrier. It was a family festival, but the dancing was in the open air, and there was a considerable number of lookers-on, of whom I was one.

I had frequently seen the famous beauty of Turin—Adrienne Leverrier—at church, or in the streets; but I never saw her look so graciously, joyously beautiful as then. Her eyes shone like southern stars. Had the marked attention, the sedulous homage of M. le Vicomte de Beauregard, who was named to me by a companion, any share in kindling that flashing brilliance? Had I been asked I should unhesitatingly have answered, 'Yes; no doubt about it.' M. Leverrier's reply

would have been the same, and delivered in a proud exultant tone. Fathers and mothers have always been chartered dreamers; and no bitter awaking of others from such dreams has ever, in my experience, afforded salutary, saving warning. M. le Vicomte de Beauregard was a very handsome young man. His air was not, I thought, *distingué*, but his features and figure were undoubtedly good, his manners easy and graceful. He was dressed, too, in excellent taste; and though, to my mind, there was too much of the *muscadin* about him, no one could doubt that he was a man to make rapid way in a disengaged young lady's favour. The spectators had increased so fast, that presently there was a gradual encroachment upon the space occupied by the dancers. There was no rudeness manifested; but the pressure, spite of the smiling remonstrances, became inconvenient, and M. Leverrier was at last obliged to ask the assistance of myself and companions in keeping back the admiring rustics. The appeal to us attracted the notice of the Vicomte, who gazed at us curiously, very curiously, I thought, as if he had seen us, me especially, before, and his colour perceptibly heightened. But that might be my fancy. Was it fancy also that the ring of his voice, a sort of broken high-pitched tenor, not unpleasing, but peculiar, sounded familiarly in my ear, though the only words he uttered as he turned away were,

'Ha! agente di polizia'? The slight service required of us by M. Leverrier was rendered, and we went our way. I could not dismiss the notion that I had somewhere met with the Vicomte when he did not figure in that exalted rank of society. Not that I had the faintest, dimmest recollection of his flexible, rather peculiar features—a somewhat too prominent aquiline nose for one—I did not remember having seen that before. But the remarkable voice! It was, as I have said, a *very* remarkable voice. I could not help worrying and puzzling myself about so trifling an incident, longer than I ought to have done. 'But perhaps I should not have succeeded to the modest extent I did in my vocation had not my ear caught up and retained faint echoes, which the merest trifles would at any moment reawaken.

It was in the midst of the civil confusion in Turin that I waited officially, and by desire, upon M. Napoleon Leverrier. He had a considerable quantity of rare jewels—diamonds, rubies, and emeralds—in his possession, valuable not only intrinsically, as I understood, but for remarkably skilful cutting and setting. I was informed that the major part, if not all of these, were a deposit. M. Leverrier had advanced a very large sum upon them, undertaking to return them to the proprietor or proprietors within a given period, upon reimbursement of his capital, with such interest as had been agreed upon. Under such circumstances

he was more circumspect with these particular gems than with his own absolute property. They were kept in an iron box, secured by an English 'Chubb-lock,' in his own sitting-room, and never but on one occasion, that he remembered, had been taken out or disturbed, and that was one evening when Adrienne was arrayed for a ball, when it occurred to the proud father that even his daughter's dazzling beauty would be enhanced by the coronet of diamonds and emeralds lying in the iron chest. There could be no harm done by her wearing it for that night only. Napoleon Leverrier unlocked the chest, and placed the glittering ornament upon his daughter's brow. Adrienne wore it at the ball; and upon her return it was safely re-deposited in the chest.

I had been sent for by M. Leverrier to investigate a robbery of his premises during the previous night. The lock of the shop-door had been forced off; and, by some cunning contrivance or other, one end of the iron inside-bar must have been lifted up and out of the iron staple into which it fell, as without that the forcing of the lock would not have enabled the robber to obtain admittance. The most valuable portion of the stock had been invariably placed, since the disturbances began, in a ponderous iron chest, kept in a sort of cellar beneath the shop flooring, in which was a trap-door, itself securely fastened, through which M. Leverrier's trade-servants descended of a morning

by a ladder, and fished up, so to speak, the nightly buried treasure. These were safe; and M. Leverrier's loss would have been trifling, but that the iron box in the back sitting-room, containing the hypothecated jewels, had been rifled. There was not one gem left.* M. Leverrier I found to be as much perplexed as distressed in mind by the very serious loss. 'To replace them, as he was bound to do, if they were claimed within the stipulated period, which was just on the point of expiring, would cost an enormous sum.

'And how came it that the lock, the Chubb-English lock, can have been picked? Ah, it is perfidious Albion even in locks. No violence has been used—none!' added the disconsolate jeweller, as he critically examined the uninjured lock, which answered to its own key as smoothly as ever.

At this moment Andrea Sfoza, a brother officer and smith by trade, came hurriedly into the sitting-salon.

'The lock to the street-door,' he said, 'was not forced from without. It has been wrenched off by some person inside. The bar, too, was no doubt lifted by the same hand. These dents on the inside face of the lock have been done by a hammer. It is all for deception.'

'Impossible!' exclaimed M. Leverrier, but looking aghast at the officer; 'impossible! we have only female servants in the house.'

'You have lodgers,' I remarked softly.

‘Yes, lodgers, *parbleu!* No doubt I have lodgers. What does that say?’

‘Nothing that I am as yet aware of. It is possible that a robber, or robbers, may have been concealed within the house before it was closed.’

‘No, that is not possible. Since the burglary committed by that means in the Porta Nova, I have taken care to examine every room in the house, the apartments of lodgers included, peeped under the beds, looked into closets. No; there was no one concealed in the house last night when the doors were locked and bar fastened.’

‘Who knew, besides yourself that such costly jewelry was contained in this small iron chest?’

‘Only my daughter Adrienne.’

He then related to me—my comrade having gone back to the shop to pursue his examination—that which is already known to the reader—M. Leverrier’s taking the coronet from the box and presenting it to his daughter for her adornment at the ball.

‘Was no one present but yourself and daughter at the time?’

‘No one, I am positive.’

‘Did you escort the young lady to the ball yourself?’

‘No, she went accompanied by M. le Vicomte de Beauregard.’

‘M. le Vicomte went and returned with your daughter. Did she give you back the coronet

in this room when she returned with M. le Vicomte ?

‘Yes, yes. I think so. M. le Vicomte admired it very much. It was not in the least damaged, and I put it back immediately.’

‘In the presence of your daughter and M. le Vicomte, I understand you to say ?’

‘*And M. le Vicomte de Beauregard,*’ returned M. Leverrier, with a glare intended to express only surprise and indignation. It expressed more—uneasiness, vague, undefined, but palpable, real. ‘It is impossible you can intend any offensive imputation upon the honour of a peer of France ?’

‘No imputation upon the honour of a *peer of France* is likely to cross my brain, much less to pass my lips.’

‘You emphasise “peer of France” ?’ said M. Leverrier, still in an angry tone, but with increased ‘apprehensiveness in his glance. ‘You emphasise “peer of France,” and there is a covert sneer on your lips. Do you insinuate that M. le Vicomte de Beauregard is *not* a peer of France ?’

‘I have never seen a list of the French peerage, M. Leverrier, and any opinion I may have, at haphazard, formed upon the subject would not be worth a penny. You must not be angry with me, M. Leverrier. I shall simply follow out my course of duty in seeking for, and closely examining, the minutest clue that may by possibility lead to a discovery of the robbers.’

I should here remark that an officer of the Public Safety had made a private report to the effect that the foreigner temporarily domiciled with M. Leverrier might be a very respectable person, but it was, for several reasons, doubtful that he had a right to call himself Vicomte de Beauregard.

‘I do not dispute that,’ said M. Leverrier. ‘It is both your duty and your right to seize upon and follow up the slightest clue that may present itself—’

At that moment M. le Vicomte entered the apartment very softly. I had not heard his step. Might he have been listening? It was probable. He was pale, his manner hurried, confused, and he steadily declined to look *me* in the face. His manservant or valet, Richard Balleine, stood just without the open doorway by which the Vicomte had entered.

‘I am going out for the evening,’ said he. ‘Adrienne,’ he added, ‘is better, much better, or, though the appointment I have made is most important, imperative, I would not go. Adieu, mon ami. Let us hope not only that the robbers may be found out, but the jewels be recovered. That is the result to be arrived at.’ Saying that, he left, followed by Richard Balleine.

That unmistakable voice again! I was positive I had heard it when it did not issue from a Vicomte’s lips; but where, when, how long since?

The speaker I certainly had never seen, except at the rustic dance. I was at once absorbed in a reverie, from which I was roused by the angry voice of Leverrier.

‘Now then, M. Ristori, are you dreaming, or is there some clever scheme for the detection of the villains and recovery of the lost jewels slowly hatching in your brain?’

‘M. Leverrier,’ I answered, with gravity, stern gravity, ‘I must make a minute search of this house; open every armoire, every desk, every box or trunk in it, those in use by or belonging to the individuals to whom you have let apartments not excepted.’

M. Leverrier turned paler than before, was yet more visibly agitated.

‘I see,’ he presently rejoined, ‘in what direction your suspicions point. But the notion is utterly, ludicrously absurd, I assure you.’

‘It may be, probably is, unfounded, M. Leverrier, but I deny the absurdity. I will be frank with you. I do not think that our Italian craft of making words a screen to thoughts is of much avail in the game of life. M. le Vicomte de Beauregard, if he really is M. le Vicomte de Beauregard— Ah, M. Leverrier, that suggestion touches a sensitive chord, I perceive. Enough. M. le Vicomte, or whatever he may be, was the only person present except your daughter when you re-deposited the coronet in the iron chest. He

is, you positively state, the only person except yourself and daughter who knew there were any costly jewels locked up in that box ?

‘Yes, yes; admitted. But even then—’

‘Permit me, if you please, M. Leverrier, to put the case, up to a certain point, as clearly before you as I can. So far we are agreed. It now appears that your establishment has not been broken into, but *out of*. You are positive that no stranger could have concealed himself in the house, and now we find that the iron box has been opened—the lock *picked*, you believe. I do not; but of that presently. The rare jewels, which only the Vicomte beside yourselves knew were there, are gone; and a bungling attempt has been made, by dinting the door-lock with a hammer, to induce a belief that it had been forced by burglars. What am I to think, M. Leverrier? The suspicion forced upon me may be, I repeat, erroneous, unfounded; but it is nonsense to say it is absurd.’

M. Leverrier was silent for several minutes, with his face hidden by his outspread hands, his head bowed, his elbows resting on his knees, as he rocked himself to and fro in painful cogitation. Adrienne, or I was greatly mistaken, troubled, almost engrossed, the father’s silent communion with himself. I remained silent as he.

At last he started up, shook himself.

‘I feel,’ said he, ‘as if oppressed by nightmare.’

Bah! What fools we are! For example, how could such a person as the Vicomte have acquired the rare mechanical skill to pick one of those celebrated patent English locks, which may, the fiend fly away with? They are impositions!

‘Where did you generally keep the key of this iron chest?’

‘There is, no *generally* about it. I *always* keep the key in my waistcoat pocket: never parted with it. Last night it was, as it is now, in the right-hand pocket of my vest.’

‘It is an ordinary practice for gentlemen of your age to take a *siesta*, a nap after dinner. Is it yours, monsieur, may I ask?’

‘It *is* my practice—*parbleu!*—has been now for perhaps a dozen years. I doze, sleep soundly, for about an hour. During that time I am never disturbed. Even Adrienne does not enter the room.’

‘But the door of the room is open, I presume? You don’t lock yourself in?’

‘Certainly I do not. My orders are sufficient to secure me from intrusion.’

‘I do not question that, M. Leverrier. Still, any one acquainted with your habits might softly steal into the room when you were asleep and quietly pick your pocket, for example. In that case the jewels could be laid hold of by the thief and carried off, and the key restored to your right-hand vest pocket whilst one could count a hundred.’

'Nom de Dieu!' shouted Leverrier, breaking into hearty laughter. 'How clever we are! What blocks of granite we see through! As it has happened, M. Ristori, yesterday evening, and immediately before going to bed, I opened the iron box and saw every jewel safe there. My reason,' added Leverrier, 'for opening the box was that in it, with the jewels, was deposited the duplicate memorandum I gave when I advanced the money upon their hypothecation, and the thought struck me that the time must be nearly expired. I had some reasons for wishing that it had run out. I saw that only a week remained, when, if the advance, with agreed interest, were not repaid the jewels would be mine. That document,' added Leverrier, with acrid bitterness, 'has not been stolen. It may be useful. Thus drops to pieces, M. Ristori, the house of cards you were so cleverly building up.'

'Softly, M. Leverrier, you run on too fast. I must, for all that, persist in opening and ransacking every receptacle, every piece of furniture in the house.'

M. Leverrier's anger flamed forth more fiercely than ever.

'What right had I, a subordinate officer of police, to assume such authority in the absence of special instructions?'

'Simply, M. Leverrier, because I am an officer of police; whether subordinate or not is nothing

to the purpose. The President of the Criminal Court not long since severely rebuked one of my comrades for hesitating to take upon himself, in the interests of justice, such a responsibility. I will call the other officer, and we will proceed at once to carry out our plain duty.'

'One moment, if you please,' interposed M. L. ~~Le~~ ~~Vicomte~~, who was much and strangely agitated. 'One moment, if you please. I suppose you intend breaking open M. le Vicomte's desk and other receptacles, so that upon his return it will be plain to him that he has become an object of suspicion? That will inflict an incurable festering wound upon his pride, and the Vicomte is a proud, a very proud, man. He, knowing you and I have been long in secret consultation will believe that I, if I did not suggest, countenanced the degrading suspicion; the offence would be inexpiable, and my vision of greatness for Adrienne will have vanished for ever.'

'You have the ambition to make mademoiselle your daughter Madame la Vicomtesse de Beau-regard.'

'Yes; I have no doubt that the Vicomte has a right to the title he bears—that he is a veritable peer of France. But he himself, somehow having heard of malicious whisperings to his discredit, has requested me to write myself to the Grand Referendary at Paris, and ascertain the truth beyond cavil.'

‘I should not suppose there was such an officer as a Grand Referendary in the present Republican Government of France.’

‘C’est égal; some high officer, no matter what he is called, who can give an authoritative reply to my question. Now I would rather, much rather, lose the jewels than be the means of putting such an affront upon M. le Vicomte de Beauregard.’

‘You are now, M. Leverrier, permit me respectfully to say, nothing in the affair, viewed from the criminal justice point of view. Society has a right to insist, for its own sake, that criminals shall not escape the doom they merit, either through favour, weakness, compassion, or any other cause.’

‘You are resolved, then, to mar my daughter’s fortunes!’ exclaimed Leverrier, turning fiercely upon me. ‘I have condescended to take you into my confidence, and now you mock at me for having done so. Begone!’

‘I do not mock you, and I shall not be gone till my duty is accomplished. As to marring the fortunes of Mlle. Adrienne, I have my own ideas on that subject. It was only yesterday I was told that the young lady has been long affianced to Lieutenant-Colonel M——, the only son of the General, and that the attachment was mutual.’

‘Bah! The passing fancies of two fools. Adrienne will live to bless me for having wrestled

her beautiful brow with a coronet. Listen, M. Officier de Police : I have been led on, I hardly know how, to make a sort of confidant of you. I cannot now stop short, and must tell you all. The marriage between the Vicomte and Adrienne is settled between him and me. Adrienne will finally acquiesce, I feel assured of that. Well, I agreed with M. de Beauregard that on the eve of the nuptials, which will take place directly after I receive the answer to a letter which I shall write to-morrow from Paris, I would place in his hands the very gems of which I have been robbed, as Adrienne's dowry ! Will not that convince you that M. de Beauregard cannot be the robber, he having no possible motive for stealing that which was already virtually his ? The thing appears to me so clear that I am sure upon reflection you will view it in the same light as I do.'

I *did* reflect, anxiously reflect. My conviction that the Vicomte was the robber, as well as an audacious impostor, was not shaken in the least. Still I had no tangible proof, and was it worth while, was it prudent to alarm the fellow and put him on his guard ? If he were the wily scoundrel I believed him to be, I should find no jewels or other evidence of guilt in his apartments, he knowing the police were in the house, and knowing also, I had no doubt, what the invariable practice of Piedmontese detective officers was in such cases. Better to let the hare sit.

I feigned to be convinced by M. Leverrier's reasoning, and said that, considering the unpleasantness that would result to him from my instituting a search amongst the Vicomte's wardrobe, breaking open locks, and the rest of it, I would, though reluctantly, forego my intention.

M. Leverrier was overjoyed, and shook me warmly by the hand.

'No suspicion,' I remarked, 'can attach to your other lodgers, the Mozard family?'

'Tut, M. Mozard is a millionaire.'

Thus terminated the long interview between us. We exchanged compliments, and I left the jeweller's house.

I and Sfoza had not gone far when a young gentleman, dressed in extreme Paris fashion, accosted me.

'A word with you,' he said, in a low voice, and drawing me gently aside. 'You have been investigating the robbery at M. Leverrier's. It is a mysterious affair, is it not, mon brave? Will puzzle the wise heads of Turin, I fancy, to read it clearly off. My name? Mozard, Mozard fils. We are staying, as you know, at Leverrier's; fellow-locataires with superb M. le Vicomte de Beauregard. A famous gaillard that, is he not? Hospitable, too—the very mirror of hospitality, and generous to excess. Parbleu! I should think so: he has invited everybody in the house—garçons de boutique included, I suppose—to visit him

at his grand château in Languedoc, a few weeks or months from this; whenever we like, he will be as much delighted to see us at one time as at another, which is true enough, though M. le Vicomte said it.'

The young man was rattling on in the same strain, and having serious business on hand, I told him, if he had nothing of importance to communicate, it would be as well not to detain me.

'Pardon,' said he, 'I have something to communicate, although it will do nothing more than confirm suspicions which, if, as I cannot doubt, you are the clear-headed man you are said to be, must be already entertained by you as well as by myself and others. My sisters were awake all last night; they sleep together, and one is troubled with a raging tooth. At about two in the morning they distinctly heard M. le Vicomte's chamber-door—a heavy one, which does not turn easily on the hinges—gently opened, and the footsteps of two men, muffled footsteps, as if they had list shoes on, descending the stairs. They were much terrified, and had there been a bell in the room, which there is not—you are as barbarously off for bells in Piedmont as in France, worse—'

'Never mind about the bells. You say the ladies distinctly heard the footsteps of two persons descending the stairs. What else did they hear?'

'Once or twice, and faintly, a strange noise,

which appeared to ascend from the shop. Once there was a sound as if some heavy substance had dropped on the floor, then all was still; and in a few minutes they heard the cautious muffled steps ascending the stairs, and the Vicomte's chamber-door creakingly closed. It was an oversight on the part of such practised hands as M. le Vicomte and his sham valet not to have oiled the hinges. After that, no sound disturbed the stillness of the night.'

'There is no one sleeps *above* your sisters' chamber, except the Vicomte and his valet?'

'No one; the dormitories of the domestics and shop people are in the basement.'

'Your sisters, no doubt, mentioned what they had heard to your father and yourself?'

'To me only. My father is prostrated for a time by a cruel attack of "grippe," it was not desirable to worry him. I lost no time in communicating with M. Leverrier.'

'Well, what did he say?'

'At first, he looked blank—scared enough; but quickly recovering himself, he said, with a laugh, intended to be sardonic, but was only weak and spiteful, "Your sisters were dreaming, M. Alphonse Mozard. As to you, why, it is known you detest the Vicomte, and would lend a credulous ear to any tale to his discredit."'

'Was he justified in saying that, M. Mozard?'

‘Yes, perfectly justified in saying that I detest, abhor the pretended Vicomte. If it were only for his audacious presumption in seeking to pollute the beautiful, and amiable as beautiful, Adrionne Leverrier, by uniting his hateful self with her in the bonds of marriage. I am myself, I confess,’ added the young man, with flushing colour and trembling voice—‘I confess that I am a rejected suitor of Mdlle. Leverrier, but I could bear that, were the husband selected by her father in some degree worthy of such an inestimable prize, instead of being, as I believe, one of the most worthless degraded scoundrels in existence—a candidate, in short, for the galleys.’

‘This is bold speaking, M. Alphonse Mozard, and should not, excuse me, be lightly indulged in. Is it, do you know, with the lady’s consent that she has been promised by her father to this Vicomte de Beauregard?’

‘With her consent? She has scarcely been out of her chamber since the abominable proposition was first seriously made to her. The very thought of such an union is poison to her. Besides, she has been engaged for years past to a most estimable young man, by whom she is tenderly beloved, and whom she loves.’

‘M. le Lieutenant-Colonel M——, son of the general?’

‘Ah, you know that. Yes, M. le Lieutenant-Colonel M——, and now my fast friend.’

‘But surely, M. Leverrier, a man so doatingly fond and proud of his daughter, as well he may be, would not force a hateful marriage upon her?’

‘That is one of the contradictions in the parental nature. M. Leverrier believes himself to be the best judge of what will most conduce to Adrienne’s happiness, and to insure that happiness—the possession of a fabulous coronet—he will degrade—ruin her for life. He is inexorable. Even Adrienne’s tears and poignant distress, though it afflicts, cannot move him. And Lieutenant-Colonel M——, whom he once so esteemed, has become an object of positive abhorrence to him. He told him—to be sure, the words were spoken in a transport of rage—that were M. le Vicomte de Beauregard out of the question, he would rather that Adrienne should espouse a beggar than him.’

‘I cannot, M. Alphonse Mozard,’ I said, after a few moments’ thought, ‘see my way at all clear through this maze of contradictions. M. le Vicomte appears sure of Mdle. Adrienne—for a daughter’s opposition here, as in France, avails little against the resolute will of a father—and with her, of those costly gems. And yet he runs the risk of the galleys for life to obtain possession of them a few days earlier than he otherwise would. I cannot read the riddle; at least, not very distinctly. Favour me with your ideas, plainly and briefly

expressed upon the subject—they may enlighten mine.'

'Parbleu! the thing is very simple. M. le Vicomte lives in hourly fear that the audacious imposture will be suddenly blown; and then, of course, farewell Adrienne and the jewels. He has taken the precaution, therefore, to enrich himself, so that should the discovery be made too soon that he is a mere adventurer, a chevalier d'industrie of the vilest type, and himself be compelled to take hasty ignominious flight, his machinations will have borne precious fruit.'

'That is plausible. M. Leverrier writes this evening to Paris, at the Vicomte's request, in order to satisfy himself beyond doubt of the genuineness and solid reality of the latter's title and fortune.'

'Bah! the Vicomte knows very well that Leverrier will not write, and this is another of the contradictions in this really good and astute man's composition. He fears to be undeceived—clings like an African to his self-made fetish, and dreads to be awakened from his dream in a paradise of fools. It is inconceivable, but true, nevertheless. I, now, have written to Paris to ascertain the truth concerning the Vicomte. I wrote the day before yesterday, and five minutes after I had posted the letter, chancing to meet with the specious scamp, told him what I had done. He gave me a look in return, which, if looks could kill, would have finished me on the spot.'

‘It was imprudent of you, M. Alphonse Mozard, to have told the Vicomte what you had done—very imprudent. It has probably hurried on the completion of his schemes. However, we must be patient and closely observant. I shall be, and so, I daresay, will you. ‘There is nothing more to be immediately apprehended, I suppose?’

‘I will not answer for that.’ The Vicomte can, I doubt not, command the services of desperate reckless ruffians, and the idea haunts me that he will make an effort to win the game by forcibly carrying off Mdlle. Adrienne.’

‘Impossible!’ Your hatred and jealousy, M. Alphonse Mozard, convert, excuse me, windmills into giants.’ Forcibly carry off Mdlle. Leverrier from her father’s house—that house situate in the middle of Turin! Nonsense!’

‘*Nous verrons!* If he attempt that game it shall not be my fault if he is not baulked. Well, *au revoir*, monsieur; I have nothing more to say, I think. O, yes! Well thought of. My information is, that you may chance to meet this Vicomte in the field of La Haute Police, in which, as I hear, you are oftener employed than in those subterranean haunts of an ignoble *escroc*; in other words, that M. le Vicomte de Beauregard, and Heaven knows how many other aliases, is a well-paid, industrious, clever political spy; and, it is surmised, can serve half a dozen masters at once, or make them believe he does, whilst he impar-

tially cheats them all. This, I admit, is partly surmise ; but my informant is tolerably confident that it comes near the truth. Good-day, Monsieur ; we shall see each other again, and before long, it strikes me.'

•

Three days passed by, nothing more was heard of the jeweller and the Porta del Po, and I was preparing to depart upon a special and dangerous mission, when one of M. Leverrier's shop-servants came rushing into the office, and, as soon as he could recover breath, requested that I should accompany him back with all speed to the jeweller's. Mdlle. Adrienne had been forcibly carried off ; M. Leverrier was in a state of distraction ; all was confusion, &c.

The man had not over-coloured the state of things at the jeweller's. I found M. Leverrier in a state of absolute frenzy. His appearance was that of a maniac. Froth overflowed his lips, and his wild shrieks for his child, his Adrienne, were piteous, desolating. He was pacing to and fro with an open letter, crushed up in his hand, and did not for a minute or so observe me. When he did, he, with one convulsive shrieking sob, threw himself into my arms, and burst into a passion of tears. This relieved him. I laid him gently down on a couch, took the letter proffered me by his shaking hand, and read it. I copy it almost verbatim :

*

‘ *To my esteemed friend, Napoleon Leverrier,*

‘ Cher Monsieur,—Before this brief note reaches you, the long absence of your charming daughter, who, as you suppose, went to shrift this morning, according to frequent practice, at the Capuchin church, on Monta Rosa, setting out about eight o’clock, will have alarmed you. Dismiss your fears, Loverrier. The amiable Adrienne is safe with, and will never more be separated from, me. We are indubitably one. I and she recognised that fact from the first to be her destiny. It is quite useless, my excellent friend, to attempt pursuit. It would be foolish in the extreme to make an outcry about an affair which, however it may be characterised, is a *fait accompli*, and therefore irremediable. I shall be very kind towards this superb Adrienne. She recognises the unquestionable fact in its full significance, that I am her destiny; will resign herself to the inevitable, attach herself to me, and find her consolation in daily increasing love and devotion to the man who has dared so much to obtain her. The truth is I had no choice but to act as I have done. The situation may be thus briefly stated. The rancorous, the savage jealousy and restless suspicions of that contemptible *pekin*, Alphonse Mozard, and other causes, rendered it impossible that I should obtain such a glorious prize in the bizarre lottery of life as Adrienne

legitimately. I must, then, resign that divine creature, or compel her to be mine by the only mode open to me. Could the decision of any man with blood in his veins be doubtful when such an alternative was presented to him? I did not hesitate for a moment. There is nothing more, I think, to be said. It will be long, I fear—fear on your behalf—before you again see Adrienne in Turin. In the mean time console yourself, my good Napoleon Leverrier, with the knowledge that your beautiful Adrienne is under the protection of one who adores her.

‘Votre serviteur, HENRI, Vicomte de Beauregard, and your sincere friend.

‘Postscriptum.—We shall probably sail for the East in a few days, and Orientalise for three or four years.’

‘Scoundrel!’ was the exclamation which ground itself out through my teeth as I flung down the atrocious scrawl. ‘Scoundrel! a thousand times scoundrel!’

The unfortunate Leverrier unclosed his eyes, and motioned to another letter lying on the table. I read it. It was an answer received that morning from Paris to Alphonse Mozard’s letter of inquiry concerning M. le Vicomte de Beauregard. It briefly stated that, from the description given of the pretended Vicomte and his valet, the former

was one Philippe Manzard, the valet his half-brother, who squinted frightfully, was slightly lame, and had lost the little finger of his left hand. (The description was exact.) They were two swindlers — accomplished swindlers. . Philippe Manzard was a married man; he had some years since espoused a woman possessed of a small fortune, which he had squandered,* and Madame Manzard was at that moment in one of the Paris hospitals. He had, likely enough, half a dozen other wives. The French authorities had long been on the look-out for him; but he was in some way protected; his supposed avocation being that of a political spy, in which capacity, in consequence of his clever audacity and surprising power of *facial disguise*, he made himself very useful to his powerful patrons, &c. . . .

What a dreadful business! My heart bled for the father; more for the beautiful, the pure-minded pious girl. Good God! What could be done? How rescue Adrienne from such abhorred companionship?

M. Lefevrier, considerably calmer—the calm of a settled despair—nevertheless questioned me with his eyes, as if it might be possible that I could suggest hope. •

‘Is M. Alphonse Mozard at home?’ I gently asked. ‘I should like to speak with him.’

A flash of hate shot out from Levorrier’s eyes at the question, which greatly surprised me.

‘Yes, yes; he is up-stairs,’ was the answer. ‘See him if you will. He can give no help. No doubt he rejoices secretly at the ruin, the heart, the soul, and body ruin which has fallen upon me!’

‘M. Leverrier,’ I remonstrated, ‘you are unjust, I am sure, to the young Mozard. He has a kind and feeling heart, I am quite sure.’

‘Malediction upon such a kind and feeling heart! Only half an hour ago he introduced the name of Lieutenant-Colonel M——, whom I hate, detest. But for him the villain Manzard would have had no chance of carrying out his hellish project. Adrieune was, I find, accustomed to meet him when on her way to shrift, or when returning from the Capuehin church. Manzard knew of that, and laid his plans accordingly. Curses, a thousand curses, upon all three of them! Yes, you will find him up-stairs. He was out from early morning, and returned about half an hour since, bringing with him that letter from Paris. I shall be able to speak with you,’ added Leverrier, in a gradually hardening tone of voice, ‘when you come down. My heart is turning to stone, my nerves to steel. I have work—a father’s work—to do before the curtain falls upon a hateful world, and will do it. I count upon you to aid me. Do not be gone long.’

I found Alphonse Mozard in by no means such distress, such agony of mind, as I had anticipated. True, he was agitated, restless; but he could

• speak of a catastrophe which made my blood boil—I, that knew nothing of Adrienne Leverrier except by casual sight, and he had been, by his own avowal, her devoted lover—with a certain degree of calmness. I intimated my surprise, at which Alphonse Mozard absolutely laughed—a forced feeble laugh, certainly.

‘That which is done cannot be undone, Monsieur. It is altogether useless to wear one’s heart out with vain regrets. Why did the obstinate inexorable fool of a father refuse her to Lieutenant-Colonel M——? Even now he flies into a fury at the bare mention of his name. The goad to rage is no doubt the sting of self-reproach. It is all, all Leverrier’s own fault. He has only himself to blame for the dreadful calamity which has befallen.’

‘I am astonished, M. Alphonso Mozard, at your remarks. There may be, there is truth in what you say; but this surely is not the time to urge it. Neither, permit me to say, was it kind of you to fling the name of Lieutenant-Colonel M—— in poor Leverrier’s teeth at such a moment. But enough of this for the present. I have sought you to know if you think you can, through your Paris friend, ascertain such particulars concerning this fiend Manzard as may lead to his apprehension; for capture him I will, if the achievement be possible. As to his intended departure for the East, that is all rubbish.’

‘I quite agree with you in that,’ said Alphonse Mozard; ‘what should such a swindler as he do in the East? Thunder! he would be more likely found in one of the *banlieues* of Paris. Yes, I will write to my friend, and ask him to search out and forward all the information obtainable with respect to the atrocious scoundrel. I will communicate with you directly I receive an answer. *Au revoir, Monsieur.*’

The coolness of the young man surprised me much. I could only account for it on the ground of the proverbial fickleness of young men. Adrienne Leverrier had once inflamed his fancy; but the fancy had passed, and she was no more to him—his grief for her sad fate was scarcely more than would be excited by a similar calamity having befallen a person of whom he had never before heard. Very fortunately, as it proved, I did the young man gross injustice. He would tranquilly await his time of explanation.

I found M. Leverrier, when I rejoined him, sitting in his chair, calm, cold, rigid as a statue. The paroxysm of rage and despair was over. He accepted the gift of a merciless fate with the steel stoicism of a Red Indian. I knew it was acting, melancholy acting, on the part of Leverrier. The fire of rage was concealed, not quenched. Beneath the calm exterior it burnt fiercely as at first—ay, but the more fiercely for its compression!

‘Adrienne is lost!’ said he; ‘and with her is

gone all of healthful life that I possessed. She will be for ever dead to me, except as the living element which will feed the flame of vengeance till it is slaked in the miscreant's blood—'

'M. Leverrier—'

'Do not preach; sermons would be thrown away upon me. I shall want your official assistance. It shall be handsomely rewarded. You are poor, and just married—I speak to the point—the mission, too, comes strictly within the scope of your duties. The Vicomte—Manzard—whatever name the villain goes by, stole the jewels; there is no question of that. They are peculiar, and will be easily identified. Convicted of the robbery, his abduction of my child—looked upon by the judges, as it will be, as an enormous aggravation of his guilt—his sentence cannot be less than imprisonment, with hard labour, for life. Ha, ha! I shall be satisfied with that, since to him it will be a hundred times worse than death! • Certainly it will: that is not a brief tremendous spasm, and then silence—darkness, repose for ever—but a long life-agony—a horrible living death to a man of luxurious sensuous tastes, with no escape therefrom, no possibility of escape. I shall be, I repeat, satisfied. Now then, my friend, set about your preparations; gather all the information that can be obtained. Tell Pinelli—he, also, is comparatively poor—that if, through any intelligence he can obtain and forward to you, the villain shall be

caught, I will present him with ten thousand francs. That is permitted, as I know. Stop, he shall not depend upon a verbal promise; I will write it out,' added M. Leverrier, seizing pen and paper. 'There it is, M. Giuseppe. Place that in the hands of your chief, it will forward our affair. There will be no difficulty about your accompanying me, or the duration of your absence from Turin. For me, I shall be ready in a quarter of an hour. I have determined to close the establishment; dismiss all my servants. An old French soldier—a *vieille moustache*—domiciled poorly enough in Turin, who was decorated by the Emperor himself, will remain on the premises. He is true as steel, and grateful to me. No one shall know whither I am gone. To the Mozard family I have just sent up notice to quit; Jean Saultier will see them out of the house this day week. You and I start this evening—within an hour, if possible. Inaction is insupportable; I am calm whilst acting, or in contemplation of action. But inaction would drive me mad.'

'You have talked yourself out of breath, M. Leverrier. You have gone far to addle my brains. However, we shall find time to reason more coolly upon the subject. I, for my part, am quite willing to assist you—'

'Merci, merci, mon brave. I shall not be ungrateful.'

'The mention of the Mozard family reminds

me that Mozard junior writes to-night to a Paris friend, soliciting further information concerning the Vicomte de Beauregard. Were it not well to await the answer ?

‘No, no, no, *no*!’ was the emphatic reply. ‘Tell young Mozard to forward you the letter of his friend through Pinelli. I had almost forgotten to say that I do not wish it to be known to the Mozards, or any other persons, not even to your chief, that I accompany or shall be with you. It is a morbid fancy, perhaps; but I wish at once to die out of the world, to pass away from its thoughts, to be looked upon as one dead. There will be no need of my return once that vengeance is satisfied. A well-attested notarial document will suffice the soldier to take possession, and dispose of the property here as I shall have directed. Now, then, let us be busy—brief!’

‘Another moment. Caution—counsel, do not breed delay. I am anxious to ascertain how the scoundrel could have obtained access to the iron box without forcing it open. I can see his apartments?’

‘Certainly you can; but be quick. He had the jewels, by whatever means he obtained them.’

I was absent about ten minutes only.

‘Look,’ said I, showing some fragments of moulding wax, upon which was the impression, more or less perfect, of several keys; ‘the man, and his man—his half-brother—are, no doubt,

adepts in taking impressions of keys in wax. The art is not so easily practised as many suppose. My surmise was correct. Whilst you were taking your after-dinner nap, M. le Vicomte, or his colleague—he himself, probably—borrowed your key, and took a facsimile of it in wax. That done, the rest was easy.’

‘I have been a cursed imbecile throughout,’ was Leverrier’s brief comment. ‘But the game is not finished. “*Alla giornata*,” as you Italians say; and *the day* will come. The certainty that it will flashes through my brain like lightning gleams piercing thickest darkness. But, *allons!* we have had quite enough of talk; now let us be doing.’

I was quickly in possession of all immediately obtainable information, and M. Leverrier and I took our places in the *coupé* of the diligence to Alessandria, having previously agreed to be apparently strangers to each other, except so far that we were fellow-voyagers, bound to Alessandria, and to return thence after our business was completed. I took several disguises in my large portmanteau, inducing a belief in the mind of the officer at Alessandria—who examined our luggage to ascertain if in them were any articles liable to the town or octroi tax—that I was a dealer in frippery, in second-hand theatrical and other habiliments.

Alessandria is more a fortress than a town ; nevertheless, there is much active civilian life within the walls, and nowhere, except perhaps in Lombardy, were the Tedeschi hated with a fiercer detestation. The Austrians had for a time, in accordance with treaty stipulations dictated by the victor, formed part of the garrison. They were chiefly Croat regiments, and insolent and brutal in the extreme. The Austrians, so far as my observation has gone, always contrive to render foreign domination still more hateful than it must always be, by low, vulgar, petty insolences, very difficult to bear with even seeming patience.

We put up at the Victor Emmanuel hotel. There was no end of Victor Emmanuels since Charles Albert's renunciation of the crown and self-expatriation. Leverrier and I did not present ourselves at the hotel together, though frankly recognising each other at the general breakfast-table on the following morning before a considerable number of guests. I had then assumed a French uniform, that of a Sous-Lieutenant in the Chasseurs d'Afrique. I could speak French quite sufficiently well to pass muster amongst Italians ; and I foresaw that the French uniform might stand me in good stead. The French nation was the Messiah of nations in the eyes of the Italians. It was in that quarter that the day-star of liberty—not to be again quenched in blood—would arise. Events have since proved that the instinct of the

people did not err; it seldom does. Of course I had travelled as a private person in plain clothes, a common practice.

I sauntered about the town, looking at both sides of the way at once, often passing M. Leverrier similarly engaged. Dinner-time came, and I seated myself, as did Leverrier, at some distance from me, amongst the earliest *convives*. Eagerly I scrutinised each new comer, and no question that Leverrier did the same, with far more eager rampant expectation, morally sure, as we were, that the Vicomte was in Alessandria. The rascal was not a frequenter of the Vittorio Emanuele—at least, he did not dine there on that day. Well, patience, and shuffle the cards. It was unreasonable to expect that we should pounce so soon upon our quarry.

I remained for some time after dinner was over, lazily sipping wine, in a sort of weary lassitude, though I had intended to call upon a famous hair-dresser, whose address had been given me. My black curly locks had never resumed their curly glossiness, their luxuriant growth, since I was subjected to that accursed tonsure. Something ailed them. Marietta worried about it more than I did. Christopher Bertini, the Alessandria artist, could, it was said, almost make the hair grow again on a worn-out horse-brush. Surely, then, he might invigorate my crop of hair, however poor the soil from which it sprang. But I could call upon him any day.

So I sat lazily sipping my wine, and wondering if it would be my good fortune to be entitled to the handsome recompense promised by Napoleon Leverrier. I should be well-backed up from Turin, that was quite certain. The promise to pay ten thousand francs, in a certain contingency, had heated Signor Pinelli's zeal to a very high temperature. At parting, he told me it would be an indelible stigma upon the Turin police if that monster of iniquity, the Vicomte, were not, through their instrumentality, brought to condign punishment.

Whilst drowsily musing upon many things, my ear caught the sharp tones of a voice, which I at once knew to be a Jew's. Looking towards the upper end of the table whence the voice came, I saw an Israelite deep in conversation with a substantial respectable-looking citizen. The subject was the relative value of rubies and diamonds. The Jew, who boasted of being one of the largest dealers in precious stones established in Italy, asserted that, up to a certain value, rubies were as costly as diamonds. Under pretence of getting nearer to a dish of fine fruit, I shifted my place to nearly opposite the speakers, in whose conversation I exhibited much interest, affecting to hold that the Jew had the best of the argument, though I knew nothing whatever upon the subject. The Christian interlocutor soon went away, and the Israelite, a very voluble gentleman, continued his discourse, with a self-satisfied smile, to me.

‘I have felt interest,’ said I, ‘in your conversation with the monsieur who has just left for an especial reason. The colonel of the regiment of Chasseurs d’Afrique, to which I had the honour to belong, will shortly be married to the daughter of an ancient house, and he being tolerably rich himself, the lady possessed of ten times his wealth, is desirous of presenting her with a splendid *coiffure*, composed mainly of diamonds and emeralds. M. le Colonel is not, as I have said, a man rolling in riches, and is anxious to obtain the gems,—he would have them set in a *coiffure* by a Parisian artist, at as near as might be their intrinsic value. He has commissioned me, and, no doubt, others, to inquire, during my furlough, as to where such articles can be purchased at the lowest cost.’

The eyes of the Israelite sparkled with mirth as I spoke.

‘Your M. le Colonel,’ said he when I had done, ‘is, I can believe, a clever soldier. He could, I daresay, skilfully circumvent an armed enemy, but not the man who shall sell him precious gems. How will he know that the diamonds, the emeralds, are offered to him at their intrinsic value? It is nonsense—folly! Now, I have diamonds and emeralds to sell; but your colonel shall not have them at their intrinsic value. I can make profit of my merchandise without telling such abominable lies as that. How

much money, now,' added the Jew, in a serious tone—'how much money, now, has M. le Colonel to spend in jewels?'

My answer was, that I could not of my own positive knowledge say anything about that, but I had no doubt he had a handsome sum at his disposal. Besides, it being well known that he was upon the point of espousing a rich heiress, his means of raising money were not restricted.

'That is true—that is clear,' said M. Jacobs. He handed me his card across the table. 'That is very true. Well, I told you I have diamonds and emeralds, beautiful, superb gems, and I am even now striking a bargain for still finer ones, which I shall buy cheap, O very—very cheap,' added the Jew, rubbing his hands gleefully together; 'but which I tell you candidly, I shall not *sell* cheap. I am an honest merchant, M. le Sous-Lieutenant, because to be honest—that is, pretty fair honest, you know—is the way to get moneys. Lying is bad in trade.' I shall serve your colonel better than any one else, though I do not pretend I will not make a good profit out of him.'

I said his candour was admirable, and adverted to the purchase he was about to make. Were they such extraordinarily brilliant gems? M. Jacobs should think they were. He would not say unrivalled gems, but of very superior quality indeed.

'I was shown some yesterday,' said I, 'by a gentleman who had heard that I was commissioned to make, or at least to negotiate, such a purchase. They were fine gems;' and I described some of those of which Leverrier had been robbed.

The Jew stared with both his dark Asian eyes as I was speaking.

'What kind of a man was he that showed you those jewels?' he asked.

I described M. le Vicomte.

'Ah! that is not my man; and yet it is strange! Some friend perhaps. Did he say where you might find him?'

'No; I was pressed for time and forgot to ask. Perhaps you could tell me?'

M. Jacobs laughed merrily.

'To be sure I could, and to be sure I won't. But you cannot have seen the proprietor of the gems. Ah! what a nose that man has! it is so long that it falls down over his chin. A most extraordinary nose—a great affliction, he told me. A queer-looking man besides that; one of his eyes the right one, is set, does not move, and always seems to be piercing you through like a sword. There is something strange about Signor Palza.'

'Signor Palza! Is that his name?'

'As to that, I cannot say; he so called himself to me; I know no more than that. But let us speak of business. When shall I show you the jewels?'

‘When will you have them in your possession?’

‘In an hour—two hours at furthest.’

‘Here, if you like, this evening; I shall not go out.’

‘That will do. Palza and I, when we have finished the transaction, that is, when I have the jewels, he the money, shall go for an hour to have a glass for luck, at the Café Santa Lucia; when I leave him I will come to you. But, M. le Sous-Lieutenant,’ added the Jew, ‘you have not told me your name!’

‘St. Evremont, a needy offshoot of the great Languedoc family.’

‘It is a fine name, St. Evremont; and as to riches,’ added Jacobs, with a humorously sardonic smile, ‘does not every French conscript carry a field-marshal’s bâton in his knapsack? Adieu for the present; it is now four o’clock; in just three hours I will return.’

Corpo di Bacco! I had struck, almost by accident, a brilliant trail! Leverrier would get back his jewels, save that one priceless jewel of his heart, more precious to him than all the mines of Golconda. But the recovery of the plunder was but a secondary consideration. The first, to secure the robber, the ravisher, and drag him to infamy and punishment. How could that be compassed? Quite clearly, the practiced rogue had passed the jewels into another’s possession. The Vicomte had a longish, not unhandsome nose, but the

enormous proboscis spoken to by M. Jacobs, to say nothing of the set immovable eye, was quite conclusive that the man with whom the astute Israelite was about to conclude a transaction was not the Viconte, otherwise Manzard. But he could not be far off. By tracking his agent he might be unearthed, cunning fox as he was. Would it be well to acquaint Leverrier with the discovery I had made, disclose to him the improved situation in which we stood? I decided not to do so. He was too rash and impulsive: I would act alone, for the present, at all events.

I touched the sonnetto on the table. A waiter answered the summons, of whom I asked whereabouts the Café Santa Lucia was situated.

‘In the Grand Piazza, monsieur. It is a new establishment, named after the victory obtained last year by Carlo Alberto over the Austrians. Monsieur will easily find it. We have all French tongues in our heads at Alessandria.’

In the crowded state of the hotel, with a constant stream of persons pouring in and out, the change of disguise which I deemed it expedient to adopt was not noticed. I passed out, cloaked, sashed, latted, feathered, moustached and bearded, having a good deal the appearance of a dashing brigand of the Abruzzi, unquestioned. It was a picturesque costume, much affected by the gay youth of Italy at that time. The disguise was so complete that I passed Leverrier, just as I emerged

from the hotel, without being recognised, although, as it chanced, I trod upon his toes, and he looked at me angrily, full in the face, as he growled out, 'Sacré tonnerre !' My apology was made by a bow, not by speech, and I hurried on.

A showy well-frequented place was the Café Santa Lucia. The guests were a variously costumed crowd, as was generally the case with a promiscuous assemblage in any considerable Italian city. The smoke emitted by at least two hundred cigars so darkened the room that the domino and other players had called for lights, which gleamed through the tobacco-clouds like flickering stars through an English fog. I could not discover M. Jacobs, or the man with the nose ; but when my eyes had become accustomed to the place, I looked and searched eagerly in every direction. They had not arrived, and I seated myself almost immediately opposite the chief entrance from the Piazza. There were other entrances at the back, which I was not at the time aware of. I waited with as much patience as I was master of for considerably more than an hour, and was fast coming to the conclusion that M. Jacobs and his friend had changed their mind—had gone to some other place to baptise their bargain 'for luck.'

I was just rising to leave, having been there nearly two hours, when that peculiar voice, raised higher than usual, and not far behind me, struck my ear—the voice unmistakably of M. le Vicomte

de Beauregard. I sprang to my feet, and turned sharply towards the spot where the speaker would be. My eyes fell upon M. Jacobs and Signor Palza, the man with the nose and the fixed eye. He was still speaking, and the voice was indisputably that of the robber. The face that of a man I had never seen before—never! I was confounded. Could two persons possess such exactly similar peculiar voices? Or might it be that this fellow was Philippe Manzard's twin brother? I had heard of wonderful feature-resemblances in such cases; and might not it occasionally be the same with voices? Possibly; I was no physiologist. I drew near Jacobs and his friend, who were playing at dominoes. There were several lookers-on beside myself. I did not heed the game; I was studying the nose. Could it be an artificial protruberance, a cunningly-contrived disguise? No; I examined it through a largely-magnifying eyeglass; there was no appearance of a join—not the faintest. Then the fixed immovable eye! Yes; but the voice!

A ridiculous angry feeling grew upon me. My fingers itched to have a hearty grab at the nose. That would decide if it was false or not, or the deuce would be in it. The friend of the young Mozard in Paris had said that Philippe Manzard was remarkably clever at facial changes. Perhaps he possessed a power of fixing one of his eyes. He was about the same height and figure generally, as I could judge whilst he was sitting. The

longer I contemplated the nose, the more eager I became to seize it and give it a vigorous wrench. Yet, if the nose should prove to be genuine, the consequences would be awkward. Not very; there could be no doubt that if not the actual robber, he was in collusion with the thief who stole M. Levèrrier's jewels. I had a good mind to risk it, and should have done so in another minute, there and then, had not Jacobs and his friend, their game being finished, rose to leave. That was well. I had an under-subsidary game to play in the interest of my client, which too much publicity, with mob uproar, would fatally mar.

I followed Jacobs and Long Nose closely, myself unrecognised, into the street. They were very merry, Long Nose particularly so. He talked loudly, gleefully; the clink of the Jew's gold was, no doubt, in his ears. He *was* slightly lame—slightly lame, and with the same voice as the Vicomte's! A double coincidence like that could not but be believed in, spite of the fixed eye and the monstrously elongated proboscis. I would not lose sight of the gentleman, and, whatever the consequence, I would have a hearty pull at the nose!

'I have an appointment at the Vittoria Emanuelo,' said M. Jacobs; and Long Nose shook hands at the Strada Pepoli, leading at a right angle from the Piazza. 'I shall see you in the morning.'

'Permit me, Signor Palza,' said I, suddenly

making a clutch at his nose—‘permit me, Signor Palza, but I don’t think that nose belongs to you. Corpo di Bacco, I was right! See, it is in my hand, M. le Vicomte de Beauregard, *alias* Philippe Manzard!’

The wrench was a tremendous one, tearing away the artfully-contrived adhesive substances by which it had been attached, with such violence that the blood spurted out in jets. The fellow himself was dumbfounded, paralysed.

‘Come,’ said I, ‘the farce is over; the next scene—the next to the last—will be highly tragic, the last most so of all. Unfix that gimlet eye, M. le Vicomte; its rôle is played out.’

‘I do not understand,’ said M. Jacobs, whose saffron cheeks indicated much disquietude of mind; ‘I don’t understand. What’s all this?’

‘It is very easy to understand. Signor Palza perfectly understands it. The jewels you have purchased, and, I fear, have paid for, were stolen a few days since from the domicile of Napoleon Leverrier, jeweller of the Piazza del Po, Turin, where they were deposited for security in an iron box. Justice will compel you to deliver them up. If Signor Palza were not for the moment tongue-tied, he would tell you he knows me very well, and that I am one of the agents of police at Turin, also Sous-Lieutenant St. Evremont, a needy scion of the great Languedoc family at your service, Monsieur Jacobs!’

‘Ah!’ screamed the half-demented Israelite, springing round as if rotatory motion had been suddenly communicated to him, whilst hot beads of perspiration broke out upon his clammy forehead. ‘I do not comprehend. It is vertigo. Villain! robber!’ he fiercely ejaculated, as his eye rested upon the Vicomte, and darting at him like a tiger, ‘where are my moneys—my eighty thousand francs? Give them to me, or I will have your heart’s blood!’

‘Ask this man, this officer,’ exclaimed the Vicomte in terror—‘ask this man, this officer, to let me go with you to the hotel where I am staying, and you shall have the eighty thousand francs, M. Leverrier his jewels, and no harm will have been done.’

‘Ah, that is reasonable, Monsieur l’Officier, quite reasonable. Let us go to his hotel. I get my eighty thousand francs—I *will* have them, or his heart’s blood,’ he interrupted, with a ferocious glare at the Vicomte. ‘And the signor who has been robbed—ah, villain!—will regain his diamonds, his emeralds. It is reasonable; let us set about it.’

‘It is far from reasonable, M. Jacobs, from my point of view. The majesty of justice must be vindicated—’

‘To the inferno with the majesty of justice! Does not the man, the villain who has got my eighty thousand francs, I will have them, or tear

his heart out—doesn't he offer amends, restitution? Holy Abraham, why shall Christian mens ask more?'

'Signor Palza must go with me in the first instance, M. Jacobs, to the Vittorio Emanuèlo Hotel; he will there see M. Leverrier; of whom he stole the jewels—'

'No, no, no!' gasped the abject Vicomte, pressing my arm, 'spare me that! it can do no good. The money I give up, the jewels I give up; what more can I say?'

The Israelite was indignant that I would not agree to such equitable terms. If he were recouped his eighty thousand francs, M. Leverrier obtained possession of his jewels, what in the name of Moses and all the prophets would the majesty of justice have to complain of?

Of course I was deaf to all that nonsense.

'This person goes with me,' said I, 'to the Vittorio Emanuèlo Hotel. M. Jacobs, do you hold him by the other arm, and prevent the possibility of his escape from our clutches; should he do so, your eighty thousand francs will be lost, for certain as death you will have to restore the jewels to M. Leverrier.'

'He escape!' screamed the Jew, seizing le Vicomte's arm with a grasp of steel; 'let him try to escape—ha, ha! I have him tight. Robber! villain!' again burst forth M. Jacobs, with volcanic rage, 'I will have my eighty thousand

francs or your heart's blood, by holy Abraham, I will.'

We moved onward, and had not gone fifty paces when the Vicomte, again pressing my arm, said in a trembling whisper, 'Cannot this matter be arranged? I have close upon five thousand francs in my pocket; they shall be yours, M. Jacobs shall have his money, Leverrier his jewels, if you will permit my escape.'

'Five hundred thousand francs would not bribe me to let you go! There is, there may be, I surmise nothing, all will depend upon M. Leverrier—there may be, I say, an opening for compromise. You know to what I allude?'

'I do not,' replied the scoundrel, looking as if he meant what he said; he had dropped the set eye. 'I do not, by all that's sacred, I do not.'

'It is well; you soon will know, then.'

The under-subsidary plot before spoken of, which I was anxious to plan successfully, was this: I was desirous of ascertaining the whereabouts of the unfortunate Adrienne, of restoring her to the still more unfortunate father, with as little scandal as possible. Leverrier, when the first tempest of rage and grief had passed, would bless me for so acting. He was wealthy; they could choose their place of rest where no sneering sarcasms, no barbed tongues could reach to vex them. Poor Adrienne!

We were shown at my request into a private room.

‘I go, M. Jacobs,’ said I, ‘to inform M. Leverrier that the robber is captured, that the jewels carried off are now in this room, in your temporary possession, M. Jacobs—’

‘Don’t mock me, M. l’Officier; my blood is already on fire. Tell him all can be arranged quietly, yes, quietly; above all, that I shall have my eighty thousand francs, and he, respectable plundered gentleman, his jewels.’

‘M. Jacobs, I repeat that your only real chance of ever again seeing those eighty thousand francs is your keeping fast hold of Signor Palza. I shall not be gone more than two or three minutes, and need not for a moment lose sight of the door of this room.’

‘Don’t be afraid. I let him go? I will have my eighty thousand francs or his heart’s blood.’

Not putting too much faith in that positive declaration of M. Jacobs, feeling sure, as I did, that Philippe Manzard would, immediately I left the room, offer to give him back immediately the eighty thousand francs as well as the five thousand he boasted of having in his pockets, might even suggest that Jacobs might keep the jewels, upon condition that he aided or connived at his (Manzard’s) escape, I took the liberty of softly locking the door on the outside; the bolt of the lock, strange to say for an Italian lock,

moving easily. I then hastened to M. Leverrier's room to break the news, and endeavour to persuade him to act as I should dictate, with prudence.

I might as sensibly have applied a match to a powder-barrel, and begged it not to explode. Leverrier had no sooner comprehended the substance of what I had to say, namely, that I had seized the Vicomte, and that he was in the next room but two in the corridor, than he rushed past me, and, before I could come up with him, had flown like a furious tiger at the Vicomte's throat, pouring upon him a torrent of maledictions, interspersed with shouts of 'My daughter! Give me my child, my jewels! Robber, villain, ravisher! Give them to me, or I will strangle you.'

I verily believe he *would* have strangled the unnerved ex-spy, for he was a very strong man, and passion must have trebled his natural strength. It required the utmost exertion on the part of Jacobs and myself to unloose his hold of the robber and separate them. Leverrier fell back into a chair, exhausted for a moment with rage and exertion.

'I know nothing of Adrienne, of Mdlle. Leverrier,' sullenly rejoined the prisoner, directly he could speak. 'Why am I asked for her?'

Leverrier, as the audacious felon uttered these words, would have leapt at him again had he not been forcibly restrained. He could only again hurl at his detested enemy a hurricane of curses,

exhaustive, I should think, of the resources, in that respect, of the French language.

‘Philippe Manzard, otherwise M. le Vicomte,’ said I, ‘you are in the toils. There is but one faint gleam of a chance for you, which is the restoration of M^{lle}. Leverrier to her father. The jewels we have safe enough.’

‘Yes, yes,’ exclaimed the irascible Israelite, with a groan, at the mention of jewels; ‘yes, yes, restore the young lady to her father, and my moneys to me, or, by holy Abraham, I will have your heart’s blood; now, here, in this room.’

‘I know nothing of M^{lle}. Leverrier,’ sullenly persisted the prisoner.

‘Fool! Idiot as well as ruffian!’ I exclaimed. ‘Did I not read the fiendish letter you sent to M. Leverrier, in which you boasted of the unfortunate young lady’s abduction. declared in the insolence of a devilish triumph that you were her destiny, and were about to depart for the East with her?’

A strange wild light flashed from the fellow’s eyes, giving a totally changed expression to his face.

‘M. Leverrier, then, received that letter,’ he said slowly, mechanically: his look had become retrospective. He was meditating, I felt sure, some artful subterfuge. ‘That letter was received; I doubted it—had, indeed, forgotten the circumstance. Let me see. Give me a few minutes to reflect.’

So saying, he laid his head upon the table, his face covered with his clasped hands.

‘Yes, villain,’ said M. Jacobs, ‘and reflect well! Reflect that I shall have my eighty thousand francs, or, by holy Abraham, I will have your heart’s blood; here and now, in this very room.’

The Vicomte’s decision was quickly arrived at, his course resolved upon.

‘We may settle this unpleasant affair after all. What if I restore Mdlle. Adrienne, and that I shall be able to prove beyond the possibility of dispute or cavil that she is now at this moment as pure, immaculate as when M. Leverrier last saw her—supposing I can do this, what shall be my reward?’

‘He is a liar,’ groaned Leverrier; ‘a veritable son of Satan, the father of lies! Take him to prison. His very presence, to hear him speak, stifles, poisons me. Away with him!’

The Jew hastily interposed:

‘My dear monsieur, you are not reasonable! He says he can restore your daughter unsoiled in character. That is excellent news for you and for me. You will have your dear child and your jewels, I my eighty thousand francs. The offer is reasonable; and what good will it do us to send the rascal to prison?’

‘I now,’ said the Vicomte, ‘make a proposition—a final one, on my part, from which I will not

recede one hair's-breadth. It is this. If I inform M. Léverrier where his daughter may be found, command her to return home with him—without which she will not, for, as I wrote, I am her destiny, which is no fault of mine, it is an infatuation—and it is proved to his satisfaction that she is as chaste as when she left her father's house, I shall claim as reward forty thousand francs, half the sum I received from M. Jacobs.'

'Half of my eighty thousand francs, accursed villain!' screamed Jacobs, starting up and stamping with fury. 'Is the scoundrel mad?'

'No, no; I mean forty thousand francs to be paid out of M. Leverrier's purse.'

'Ah! that is another thing. Death of my life!' added Jacobs, subsiding again into expectant disquietude, 'I thought he was gone mad. It is a reasonable offer, Monsieur Leverrier; take it. My head is cooler than yours. If—if—he can do what he promises, not else, you understand. It is reasonable. I do not say the forty thousand francs is reasonable—forty thousand devils!—no; it is *not* reasonable. Still, when one's head is in the lion's mouth, it is best to draw it out, even by suffering a few smart bites.'

'It is understood that if my terms are accepted no charge with respect to the jewels or any other matter is to be pressed against me.'

'Certainly not,' exclaimed the restless Israelite; 'not one word to be breathed concerning the

jewels, or my having bought them. That is quite understood.'

'If we come to terms,' continued the Vicomte, 'the terms must be written down, and subscribed by all parties. That is a primary condition. For my part, I further promise never again to go near, or see, write to, or otherwise communicate with M^{lle}. Adrienne. She shall not know where to find or to address me. She will then be freed from her infatuation in time, which, moreover, as I have said, is not my fault.'

There was an indescribably taunting insolence in the scoundrel's tone, which sorely tempted me to knock him down. The Jew was scarcely less aggravating with his eternal 'Ah! yes, that is reasonable; very reasonable. It will be all right at last. I shall have my eighty thousand francs,' &c. Philippe Manzard saw he had the distracted father on the hip.

It was impossible to avoid compliance with the villain's conditions. I was a consenting party. Provided no absolute injustice is permitted, a latitude of action, unknown to English detective officers, is allowed agents of police in Italy. Finally M. Leverrier gloomily acquiesced. Writing materials were brought into the room, and M. Jacobs set about drawing up the *accord* with cheerful alacrity. This was going on when one of the waiters of the establishment entered the room, and placed a slip of paper in my hand. I

glanced at it, from that to Manzard's face, whose countenance suddenly fell.

‘Sign nothing, M. Leverrier, till I return; and both of you take care that the prisoner has no chance of slipping through your fingers.’

I was absent but two or three minutes; flung wide open the door as I returned, exclaiming with a shout,

‘Your daughter, Monsieur; Lieutenant-Colonel M——, that daughter's husband, and M. Mozard junior!’

The next moment the charming Adrienne, richly attired as a bride should be, and looking inexpressibly beautiful and happy, was in her nearly fainting father's arms! For some time all was confusion, delirium—exclamations without meaning, questions to which no one waited for an answer. Enough, that it was felt that, as by a glorious *coup de théâtre*—a scene of darkness and death, haunted by horror and dread, was changed to a glittering palace, where all was light, joy, the air resounding with delicious music, and laden with the perfume of flowers.

Beside that of the thoroughly baffled ruffian, who was nigh fainting with fear as Leverrier was with rapture, one melancholy phiz bore a very unsympathetic expression, that of the again much disquieted Israelite. In what way would this sudden transformation scene affect his chance of recovering his precious money? from which point

of view only the *tableau-vivant* before him was interesting. A few minutes before he had made sure of reclutching the treasure he had rashly parted with; but now things seemed to be taking an ugly turn for him. That these thoughts were passing through his mind, needed not the confirmation of the fierce threat growled out between his teeth, as he gazed with fiery hate at the prisoner,

‘Villain! child of the devil! I will have your heart’s blood or my moneys—here, on this spot, now!’

Whilst all these ecstatic gratulations are going on, I shall have time to explain *how* such an unexpected *dénouement* came about.

Le Vicomte de Beauregard, otherwise Philippe Manzard, had formed a plot to carry off, with the aid of his half-brother, Adrienne Leverrier, by whom he was held in unqualified abhorrence. He knew that perfectly well, and he luxuriated in the anticipation of a full measure of revenge. As the reader is aware, Mozard junior and Lieut.-Colonel M.—suspected the ‘Vicomte’ of contemplating the atrocious outrage, and strict surveillance was kept over the movements of the scoundrel and his pretended valet. By so acting their suspicion grew to certainty, and a charming counterplot was improvised, which would not only discomfit the ‘Vicomte,’ but make M. le Lieut.-

Colonel M——, causelessly regarded with such disfavour by M. Leverrier, the happiest of men, besides giving him an inevitable claim upon the jeweller's good-will as the rescuer of his beloved Adrienne from worse than death. Of course the young lady was in the counterplot, or she could scarcely have spoken so openly of her intention to go to the Capuchin church at so early an hour.

M. le Vicomte's plan is perfected. He has the jewels safe to-day; to-morrow he will have the scornful lady at his mercy. He wrote the letter which reached Leverrier and intrusts to an acquaintance, whom he charges to post it, should he not by eleven o'clock in the forenoon receive orders to the contrary. That done, his preparations are complete, his success all but achieved. A post-chaise will be at an indicated spot which la belle Adrienne must necessarily pass on her way to the Capuchin church. What, then, so easy as for two strong men to seize a weak girl, stifle her cries with a gag, and whirl her away, whither no one could trace or find her, till such time as Le Vicomte, satisfied of his triumph and grown tired of his victim, should indicate to her father or friends where she might be met with and recovered?

A very clever plot, no question of that, the element of success only being required to make it perfect. The decisive moment is close at hand. The post-chaise, the driver of which has been

heavily fee'd, is at the appointed place, on Del Monte, at some distance from where Adrienne is to be pounced upon; and Le Vicomte, with his half-brother, are snugly concealed. I know the spot well—just the place for the consummation of the deed of villany in contemplation. They are brimful of glee, are the two heartless conspirators. The approach of Adrienne—a vision of Paradise—as, rosily flushed by walking up the steep ascent, and tremulous maiden fears as to the result of the adventure she has challenged, she nears the spot, excites in them no remorse, no pity. They only know and feel that their victim is unconsciously walking into the trap set for her.

Well, that would be so, Messieurs Manzard and Deslandes, were it not that there are other watchers besides your amiable selves but a few yards off. They are as eager as you. One wears the uniform of a lieutenant-colonel of Carabineers, the other, by his dress and dancing blue eyes, you would guess to be a rollicking young French gentleman, and you would be right. Both have formidable cudgels in their hands, and, if we may judge by the firm clutch with which they are held, they intend to use them, and by no means after a gentle fashion.

The maiden reaches, is passing the hiding-place of the exulting rascals, and they both leap into the road, confront, and lay hold of her. 'It's of no use fluttering your wings against the bars,

my pretty bird. You are caught, and that pretty pipe of yours is easily stopped.

Heaven and earth—how is this? The pretty bird is not caught, her pretty pipe not silenced, her merry, half-sobbing laugh, from excitement, is ringing in their ears—an accompaniment to sickening sensations, as if the craniums of each had been smashed in, which was not very far from the fact, and they themselves are lying on the hard flinty path, whilst two terrible fiends—one in the dress of a lieutenant-colonel—are belabouring them with cudgels till they howl loudly for mercy. They are ordered to get up and be off, and are unmercifully kicked along till they reach the post-chaise. They are more dead than alive; and are warned never again, as they value their worthless lives, to make their appearance within a hundred leagues of Turin. They are then driven off by the almost equally scared proprietor of the vehicle.

A few hours after, the charming Adrienne Leverrier is the wife of M. le Colonel M——, Mozard junior having the magnanimity to witness the marriage. No wonder that he showed such apparently unaccountable *insouciance* when I was condoling with him upon the unhappy young lady's abduction by the infamous Vicomte, who, I may remark, would not have been allowed to escape, had it been but tolerably certain that he had stolen Leverrier's jewels.

It was deemed advisable, in view of the

strange animosity felt by Leverrier, of late, towards the Lieutenant-Colonel M——, to defer informing him of the marriage till such a time had elapsed—two or three days would quite suffice—that, whatever his distaste to the union, he should not, for his daughter's sake, appeal to the law to procure its nullification, as undoubtedly he would have done, under the provisions of the Code Napoléon.

Judge, then, of their dismay, when young M. Mozard, who knew where to find them, called to say that Leverrier had closed his establishment and gone off, no one knew whither, but avowedly never to return, under the impression that his idolised child had been carried off by the *soi-disant* Vicomte Beauregard. Adrienne was overwhelmed with grief, and something like remorse; active inquiries were at once set on foot; and, finally, Signor Pinelli informed them that M. Leverrier, myself, and probably the Vicomte, would be found at Alessandria, at the Victor Emmanuel Hotel, he having about an hour previously received a letter from me.

The story is told. There is, I believe, nothing more to explain as regards the interesting persons who figure therein. I have, however, a few words to add concerning the Vicomte and M. Jacobs.

‘Now, M. Jacobs,’ said I, with sternness, ‘you and I are not wanted here. You will please to

deliver up to M. Leverrier the jewels now in your possession; I do not say fraudulently in your possession—that you knew they were stolen gems—though the ridiculously low price points to that conclusion. However that may be, and I am not a judge of primamotor, you have the stolen jewels about you, and must deliver them up to M. Leverrier. He will give you, no doubt, a formal receipt for them.’

‘Ah, but my eighty thousand francs, honest moneys, which I have paid for the cursed jewels. Who shall give me them back?’

‘That is quite another affair, of which we will talk presently. In the mean time, surrender the jewels, or I shall be obliged to take you into custody; you will then be searched, and the jewels taken from you by force. Be advised. Do that with a tolerable grace which you will else be compelled to do.’

‘Holy Abraham!’ exclaimed the half-frantic Jew, tearing his hair and gnashing his teeth, ‘was ever a man so persecuted, plundered, robbed, massacred? Villain! if I do not get my eighty thousand francs, I will have your heart’s blood!’

In the end the jewels were all delivered up, though the process was a long and, to the rampant Israelite, an excruciating one. The parting with each jewel was like wrenching out one of his teeth, he alternately whining and cursing in a most distracted fashion.

‘Now, M. le Vicomte de Beauregard,’ said I, ‘do you intend returning the eighty thousand francs to M. Jacobs, or must the officers of justice take charge of them?’

‘No officers of justice!’ screamed the Jew. ‘Give them to me; they are mine; I *will* have them, or your heart’s blood! Come now to the hotel. Give the moneys to me, and I will be your good friend,’ added Jacobs, in a wheedling tone, ‘come.’

The ‘Vicomte’ thought it best to comply. The Israelite recovered his eighty thousand francs short of the five thousand which Manzard had in his pocket. Manzard was then, much to his astonishment, conducted to prison, tried in due course of time for the robbery, convicted, and sentenced to imprisonment for life with hard labour.

CHAPTER VII.

I AM ORDERED TO LONDON.

THE Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, London, 1851, made, Englishmen need scarcely be told, a great sensation, a mighty stir in the continent of Europe. The excitement was great, and all but universal, not only in commercial artistic circles, but society generally. It was to be the inauguration of a new era of universal peace and perennial brotherhood.

There was, however, a serious aspect of the matter to continental governments. There were known to be in England, the land of free asylum, and chiefly concentrated in London, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of political refugees. Hundreds, thousands, of men imbued with the same principles could, it was thought, in many instances make the Exhibition, and the low charges for the voyage to and fro, a pretext for visiting their exiled friends; and favoured by the exceptional institutions of England, which rigorously forbid domiciliary visits and police espionage in families, concoct at leisure, and in perfect safety, subversive schemes directed against their native governments.

This notion was entertained by the cabinets of continental Europe without exception—unless Switzerland be an exception—and led to a determination, communicated to me by Signor Pinelli in a long conversation.

‘I have sent for you,’ said the chief, ‘to give you instructions in a rather important matter. You are ordered to London, and your sojourn there may extend over several months.’

‘To London? For what purpose, for what object?’

‘To watch the doings, treasure up the sayings, of the refugees there. Italian refugees will require your principal, but not exclusive, attention. There is a bond of political freemasonry which unites revolutionists of all countries. It will be well, therefore, that you mix freely with them all, especially the French. I think,’ added Signor Pinelli, with kind consideration, ‘your wife and child may accompany you.’

We—myself, wife, and infant son—embarked at Genoa in the *Santa Theresa*, a schooner bound direct for Southampton, England, on the 12th of April 1851, in order that we might reach London in time for the opening of the Exhibition.

The Hotel Sablonière, Leicester-square, London, where we had been advised to take up our abode, excellent as it was, did not quite suit us; and, after a few days’ sojourn there, we removed to quieter lodgings in Cranbourne-street.

The French and Italian firms, to which I was supposed to be affiliated, made a highly creditable appearance at the Palais de Cristal. The agents were well instructed. I knew very well that they had been advised I was one of themselves, though operating in a different sphere, having access to certain circles outside and inside those which would seek direct supplies through them.

This greatly facilitated my intercourse with political Frenchmen and Italians. For the first fortnight of the Exhibition I was very frequently to be seen in the French and Austrian (Milan) departments, conversing with the chief *employés*. And I spent the evenings with them, generally in Leicester-square.

The fellow whose physiognomy first fixed, or, I should say, fascinated my attention, called himself Pietro Balsamo, and used to boast that he was a lineal descendant, in a left-handed way, of the most audacious of modern quacks, Joseph Balsamo (Count Cagliostro). Both name and genealogy were, doubtless, pure inventions. He was extremely vehement, was Pietro Balsamo, in his political philippics. He quite out-Heroded Herod. All sounding brass and tinkling cymbal that; there was not the faintest ring of the true metal. By which I mean that the soul-sincerity which one could not help recognising in the spasmodic oratory of the dreaming fanatics with whom he affected companionship was entirely absent.

I soon took the measure of Pietro Balsamo ; but it was not dame-school measurement which could compass *his* moral and mental calibre. You are not a man, thought I, as I hearkened with a sceptical smile to his fanatic verbiage ; you are not a man who, having a distinct settled purpose in view, would interpret that settled purpose in words, words, words. No ; he was one, I felt, who, having once resolved upon a course of action, would follow it without scruple or remorse ; would be silent, self-contained. Like the noble, if mistaken, Orsini of more recent notoriety, Pietro Balsamo was a man to calmly dry his detonating powder in his solitary chamber, not the less calm, that he did not know from one moment to another he might not meet the death he was beckoning, for the destruction of others. Yes ; it was in that wise that I, after frequent and close observation of the man, judged the pretended Pietro Balsamo.

A strange adventure—drama, whatever you may choose to call it, was, I declare, vividly reproduced in a dream which followed close upon my having recognised the voice of Pietro Balsamo in disputatious contention with others equally excited as himself in Cranbourne-street. More than that, I, by some unaccountable physiological process of the brain, confounded Pietro Balsamo with one Michel Magnani, a notorious bandit ! Yet Michel Magnani had, or at least wore, black hair, was

swarthy even for a native of Southern Italy ; whilst Pietro Balsamo was light-haired, wore no whiskers, and indulged in only a very modest moustache, and was comparatively fair-skinned. I reflected. Complexion, hair, might have been altogether artificial, but the slight cast I now remembered to have noticed in Magnani's eyes was observable in Pietro Balsamo's ; their expression, it occurred to me, was, upon some occasions, similar to that of the bandit's and the voice of the vehement Leicester-square patriot, the tones of which had more than once struck me as faintly familiar, I recognised, or persuaded myself that I recognised, to be that of the brigand of the Apennines. But how, upon that hypothesis, could it be accounted for that he did not recognise me ? To be sure he had seen me for, one may say, a few minutes only ; his organ of individuality might be small, undeveloped. I could account for it in no other way, for sure I was that Pietro Balsamo did not recognise in the commis voyageur of two wealthy firms, the officer of police who gave him a gratuitous specimen of his skill in pistol-shooting, and subsequently painfully punctured a sensitive part in the body of his comrade in crime.

How, then, to assure myself, by more reliable evidence than dreams afford, that Pietro Balsamo and Michel Magnani were one and the same person ? I essayed a simple plan, which, if it failed, could not damage me in any more promising

scheme, feeling assured, as I did, that the man had not the most remote recollection of me.

Pietro Balsamo was an untiring boaster. No topic could be introduced upon which he had not something, and usually something miraculous, to say. Acting upon the motive suggested by this habit of lying exaggeration characteristic of Pietro Balsamo, I, with as much nonchalant adroitness as I was capable of, introduced one evening the subject of rifle-practice, the relative merits of the Minié and needle rifles, and concluded by volunteering an opinion that accuracy in pistol-firing, spite of the boasted improvements of the American Colt and others, was altogether unattainable; that the stories told of noted duellists being able to snuff out a candle with a pistol-bullet at twelve paces distant was simply brag. The thing never had been, and never would be done, except by the merest accident.

‘Pardon me, signor,’ said Balsamo. ‘You are evidently mistaken; you are, indeed. At the obscure village of Prato, at the foot of the Apennines, a youngish active man, who the landlord of the Santa Rosalia said—I daresay truly—was an officer of the Turin police, offered, for the wager of a litre of wine, to strike off or smash the head of a small stuffed bird, at the further end of a long apartment, by his first fire with one of those American revolvers. He did it, too, and I paid the wager.’

This was decisive. The simple test I had applied had proved more successful than might a cleverer device, as not unfrequently happens.

The next day I posted a letter to Turin, fully setting forth all particulars—my certainties, surmises, suspicions concerning Pietro Balsamo and four other equivocal Italians, with whom, I was clearly of opinion, I should, in the legitimate exercise of my vocation, cultivate an intimate acquaintance.

The official response, a bulky roll of papers, came to hand earlier than I had expected. They related a startling story. Magnani, driven from his haunts in the Apennines by the hot pursuit made after him, had stolen away from his companions in crime, and after several narrow escapes from capture, succeeded in reaching Florence. There he had known, when he was a promising student in the university of Florence, a friend of the Spezzia family. He was known to them as Antonio Gasparo, which there is no doubt was his real name. He was an orphan, and scantily provided for by some provision derived through an uncle, which would terminate when he attained his legal majority. He was a great favourite with the Marchese and Marchesa Spezzia, and in the end formed an attachment to the Signora Biondella, the elegant and beautiful, and at the same time humble, companion of the Marchesa. They were privately married. Madame Gasparo

gave birth in due time to a daughter, which, when but a few weeks old, was placed permanently in the charge of the sister of a convent at a considerable distance from Florence. The Biondella was, after a not very long or painful probation, restored to the favour of the Marchese and Marchesa. She passed, as before, by her maiden name, and very soon all remembrance of the *mésalliance* she had imprudently formed died out of the mind of 'society.' Could the Marchesa have obtained proof of the death of Gasparo, she would not have failed to wed her artful favourite, advantageously in a worldly sense. But no such proof could be obtained.

The Marchese and Marchesa Spezzia had no surviving offspring, and having finally resigned all hope of direct offspring, an orphan nephew, the only son of a deceased sister of the Marchesa, was adopted as the heir-presumptive to the large Spezzia property. The young man's name was Lorenzo Caracci. He was about five years old when he was received in the Spezzia palazzo, as the heritor thereof and its splendid adjuncts, and was reported a singularly amiable child; above all, docile and affectionate. The lad was about the same age as the Biondella's daughter, who, in the seclusion of the Mater Dolorosa Convent, was budding with liveliest beauty—a beauty which, to quote a passage from one of your English poets, her mother was resolved should not

always blush unseen, and waste its sweetness on conventual air, and a frosty sisterhood of icicled nuns. The impressionable lad was a frequent visitor at the convent, where, as it was afterwards ascertained, Lorenzo Caracci was, contrary to the rules of the establishment, always permitted the society of Lucrece Gasparo, no other person being present, except the Biondella. The expected result followed. The lad's love for the beautiful Lucrece, or Lucrezia, grew with his growth, strengthened with his strength, and some months before he attained his eighteenth year, he passionately implored the mother of the enchantress to consent to a private marriage.

The Marchese and Marchesa had never once spoken of Lucrece since she had been consigned to the convent. Her existence was ignored, except that the payments for her board and instruction were punctually paid.

Now the bare suggestion of a matrimonial alliance between a scion of their noble house and the daughter of Gasparo would have plunged the Marchese and Marchesa into a state of distraction. The nephew was entirely dependent upon them; the settlement of the estates, personals, &c., which had been made upon him, might at any moment be revoked—would infallibly be revoked on the slightest suspicion that such a degrading alliance was contemplated. The secret would almost certainly ooze out were a secret marriage permitted,

and ruin would fall upon all concerned. It was besides more than doubtful that a secret marriage would be legally valid. No, no; in view of such terrible and imminent contingencies, Biondella would have been untrue to herself, false to the great aim of her life, had she consented to or permitted a secret marriage.

Where was Gasparo during the long sweep of years which had elapsed since his, in a certain sense, compulsory departure from Florence? He reappeared at Florence under the name of Antonio Gasparo, who, according to his own statement, had passed the intervening years in South America, where he had suffered toils and hardships numberless; had fought under Garibaldi, with other corroborative lies, which he showered upon his hearers unblushingly. His former intimacy with the Spezzia family was not, it would seem, adverted to by him or remembered by the Florentines with whom he came in contact. He continued to obtain many private interviews with his wife. What had passed at those interviews had not, of course, been ascertained. That they had taken place at all, rested, so far as direct testimony was concerned, upon the tainted evidence of one Ugo Biancomi. This man, a fugitive from justice like Gasparo, had accidentally met with his brother outlaw in the streets of Florence. Biancomi recognised his bandit chief, and Gasparo, however bitterly he might curse the untoward rencontre,

was compelled to accept of Biancomi's companionship, supply him with necessaries, and in some degree admit him to his confidence. Biancomi was not content with that partial halting confidence, which he suspected might ultimately prove to have been no confidence at all, and he furtively watched the movements, studied the more or less slight glimpses he contrived to obtain of Gasparo's secret game, with vulpine eagerness. The knowledge he might gain would possibly prove to be his own salvation, in the not distant day, as he anticipated, when the crash would come.

The crash came. The Marchese was seized with one of his frequent attacks of gout. The mind of the Marchese continuing oppressed with an overwhelming sense of impending calamity, the Marchesa gently suggested that he should confess himself to a priest.

A priest, a cowed monk, was found, and introduced by the Biondella; the ecclesiastic and his penitent were left together, and Madame Gasparo bade the holy man 'Good-night' after the lapse of half an hour. She spoke with the Marchese, who said he felt better, both in mind and body, appeared disposed to sleep, and requested to be left to himself, his confidential valet to remain just within the chamber-door, within easy call, should he, the Marchese, require anything during the night. This was done according to his wish. The Marchesa, who was much fatigued, had previously

retired to bed, leaving strict orders that she should be called if the Marchese became worse. She was not called; and when the valet entered his master's room in the faint gray of the dawn, the Marchese was found dead.

The physicians hastily summoned to the death-chamber declared that life had been extinct several hours. Gout, it was presumed, had seized some vital part. There was no attempt to verify the unwarranted conclusion by post-mortem examination of the body, and the Marchese was borne to his long home with the accustomed funeral pomp. The Palazzo Spezzia had, it was supposed, changed masters, the nephew, Lorenzo Caracci, succeeding to his childless uncle.

This was an error, and to the Biondella one of the first magnitude. When the settlement of his estate and personal property made by the deceased Marchese came to be read, it was found that an absolute life-interest in the property was reserved to the Marchesa—that is, the estate passed to her, in absolute possession, as long as she lived, and she was a woman of robust health.

This was a terrible counter-stroke! The murder (assuming one to have been committed) had but partially achieved its purpose. To be sure Lorenzo and Lucrezia might, after a decent interval of mourning, marry without greatly disquieting themselves about the Marchesa's displeasure. Should she be spiteful enough to live on till she

dropped a rather ripe nonagenarian into the grave, the reversion of the Spezzia estates would enable them to secure, upon somewhat onerous terms, perhaps, a very handsome revenue.

Another thunder-stroke! The Biondella had for years occupied the same bedchamber as the Marchesa. The two beds were placed almost close to each other, the noble lady being chattily inclined of a night, and delighting in a little quiet gossip with her favourite upon the current events of the day. And now a peremptory order was issued that Lucrece Biondella should sleep in another apartment! The Marchesa alleged that Biondella was very restless at nights, and greatly disturbed her lady's rest.

Dr. Bosco afterwards deposed before the Syndic, that while he was thus calmly speaking, the Signora Biondella displayed much agitation, became deadly pale, and staggered rather than walked out of the apartment. He did not, however, attach much importance to the circumstance at the time.

The dark suspicion that had been slowly gathering to a head respecting the death of the Marchese de Spezzia, suddenly burst out in a tempest of bewilderment and dismay. Only four days after the brief colloquy between Madame Gaspare and the Doctor Bosco, it was discovered that the Marchesa, the Biondella, her daughter, Lucrezia, and Lorenzo Caracci had suddenly disappeared, and could nowhere be found, either in Florence or

within twenty miles thereof. Eagerly, at the instance of the authorities, was the country scoured by the Tuscan gendarmes. All that could be distinctly ascertained was that the Marchesa, the Biondella, and Lorenzo Caracci went for a carriage airing in the afternoon, that they alighted from the carriage when about three miles out of Florence, and the Marchesa, who seemed in much better health and spirits than she had been since her husband's death, had directed the coachman to drive back again to the Palazzo, as she, with her nephew and Signora Biondella, would return in the carriage of the Countess Reggio, to whom they were about to pay a visit. Inquiry being made at that lady's residence, it was found that neither the Marchesa, Signora Biondella, nor Lorenzo Caracci had called there on the day named, but that Lucrezia Gasparo had gone out alone, at about the time, or a little before, when the Marchesa Spezzia dismissed her carriage; and Lucrezia had not since been heard of! Here was a charming imbroglio! The gendarmes of Florence could not make head or tail of the affair, and at last concluded that the best thing to do was to offer a reward of five hundred florins to whomsoever could afford any clue to the disappearance of individuals occupying such distinguished positions, meaning, of course, the Marchesa and her nephew.

This, the wisest step they could have taken, brought Ugo Biancomi into the foreground. He

informed the authorities that Magnani, the notorious bandit, formerly known at Florence as Antonio Gasparo, and who was the legal husband of the Biondella, and father of Lucrezia, who had fled or been carried off from the guardianship of the Countess Reggio, had been for some months living furtively in Florence, in constant secret communication with his wife, Madame Gasparo, or, as generally called, the Signora Biondella. He further proved that the cowled monk, who was introduced by the Signor Biondella to the Marchese on the night of his death, was no other than the bandit Magnani !

A remarkable revelation that, but, if not supplemented by further information, of slight avail. The bewilderment of the officials was still further increased by receiving a letter bearing the Paris, and another the London postmark, evidently written, as the experts consulted swore, by the Marchesa herself, requesting the police of Florence, not to perplex themselves respecting her whereabouts, or that of her companions. She had left Florence of her free will, and should return thither at her own good pleasure. A heavy draft upon her bankers had, moreover, been forwarded to Florence by a highly respectable Paris house, and duly honoured. Tuscany, however, being at that time 'paternally governed,' the Grand Duke ordered the Bank of Florence to honour no more such drafts till the mystery of the Marchesa's

disappearance or abduction should be cleared up, the Grand Duke shielding them, by virtue of his supreme authority, from any troublesome legal consequences attaching to a refusal to honour the Marchesa's drafts.

I should explain that in matters of criminal police, as distinguished from the high or political police, there was a solidarity between the agents of the police force throughout, I believe, all the states of Italy. Copies of the papers, depositions appertaining to the affair Spezzia had been forwarded to the Turin authorities, who felt, moreover, a special interest in Magnani. The foregoing comprises the substance of the voluminous documents forwarded to me, and with such light as they afforded I went to work at once vigorously, but with the stealthy step of a cat. The process would be necessarily a tentative one, there being no fixed basis upon which to act. My own impression was that Gasparo, driven to extremity by his wife's conversation with Bosco revealing the awakened suspicions of the Marchesa, had determined upon the desperate expedient, which could only have occurred to a bandit traitor, to forcibly carry off that lady, and keep her in confinement till she formally consented to the marriage of Lucrezia and Lorenzo, and the settling forthwith upon them, Signor and Madame Gasparo, the estates. Still it was strange he should be so long about it. That circumstance disturbed me. There

was another element in the calculation, an important one, I felt sure, but to which I could attach no definite value.

I resolved to consult an experienced English detective officer. It need hardly be said that I had brought introductions with me to British officials. The commissioner-in-chief, by whom I was very courteously received, referred me to an inspector in the detective force, of the name, we will say, of Keen, Inspector Keen. He responded well to that name; but you would not think so at first. Certainly I did not. He did not seem on the alert. There was no hot southern blood in his veins; he could not seize at once, as it were, the problem to be solved. My narrative he appeared to slowly digest bit by bit, and, like a ruminating four-legged animal, afterwards chewed the cud of the matter. The process must have lasted fully an hour, though helped by two glasses of brandy-and-water: and even the product did not at first sight seem satisfactory.

‘This is a queer story of yours, signorini’ (for the life of me I could never break him of addressing me as signorini), ‘a very queer story. It sounds to my ears like the *Arabian Nights*, or a pantomime, or a burlesque-tragedy at Astley’s. You’ve got all the “property,” as the play-actors call such things:—Desolate tower, perched upon the Alpine snows—mysterious stranger—captain of anditti—Colt’s revolvers, though they don’t seem

to fit in well—shooting robbers, and the fox terriers—then the captain of the banditti turns up sudden and unlooked-for in Leicester-square, London—not but what there's plenty of banditti there, though not exactly of the Alpine pattern. Next it turns out that the captain of Apennine banditti, who has made himself decent by washing the dye out of his hair, has actually poisoned a real marquis, a nobleman, with no end of tin. You know what tin means, signorini ?

‘L'argent.’

‘Of course; and that job neatly effected, carries off a real marchioness, the defunct peer's wife, and her nephew also, a gent entitled to a mint of money, and his beautiful sweetheart; and not a soul, till you fancy you have pitched upon the real Fra Diavolo, a countryman of yours, and the best tight-rope dancer I ever saw—not an Italian soul the wiser, till you pitch upon a fellow, first, because he squints—next (and this, I admit, looks like a clincher), he knows all about shooting a little stuffed bird off in the Saint Something inn, in the Alps. Now, excuse me, signorini, but when you first told me the complicated story, I fancied a panorama was passing before me—the figures and scenes made up of canvas, paint, and red ochre. Now I begin to seize the reality. But with respect to what, signorini—well, never mind about that, signor, if you like, but signorini sounds sweeter; more Italianish—do you require my

advice? My assistance, of course, when there's anything to be *done*, you may rely upon.'

I answered, in my broken English, that I did not for a moment doubt his zeal or faithfulness, but should be glad of his opinion, first, as to why Gasparo—supposing, which could hardly be doubted, that I was certain of my man—who, judging from the letters addressed by the Marchesa to Florence, had that noble lady completely in his power—does not conclude the business at once?

'Gently, signorini, gently. Fears and doubts may shake the soul of even a bandit captain. A man may strip himself to take a final header, but hesitates a good while before he springs. I think nothing of the delay myself.'

'Then why, in the name of saints and angels, should he come to this country, except, perhaps, that, there being no need of passports, he—'

'Passports are *bosh*; but, excuse me, go on.'

'And why, being here, should Gasparo court publicity, as one may say, by mixing freely in tavern company; be a jolly convivialist with people he cannot be interested in, or care one straw for?'

'As to why the man has come to England, that's easy to be understood, and shows that, if not innocent as a dove, he's as wise as a serpent. No one inquires about any stranger here. The police can't go and ask a foreigner that's just come into a hotel where he came from, how long he means to stay, and what are his means of liveli-

hood, as they do on the Continent—at least, they do so in Paris.’

‘In Italy the like law prevails, though, in practice, it is not so rigorously enforced.’

‘Then, again, if a foreign gent wishes to be particularly private, he and his family, if he has one, go into quiet lodgings, where, if he pays his way, nobody inquires, or knows, or wants to inquire or know, anything about him. With respect to this bandit bravo,’ continued Inspector Keon, ‘going about to taverns, and making himself jolly and uproarious with the company, which he, as you say, can’t care much about, that, to an old stager in the police-line like me, tells a tale—not of itself exactly, but in connection, of course, with the suspicious circumstances. If there is one thing morally certain, it is, except in exceptional cases, that a murderer is always restless—can’t abide to be alone—wants to be where there is company, gas-lights—where he can mix again with society, such as it is, and try to cheat himself into a belief that he is still human. Now, this captain bandit is not, I should say, troubled about any number of people he may have disposed of in the way of business. People like noble conquerors—captains of banditti upon a grand scale, for instance—have quiet consciences. But not a private murder, like that of the Marquis. I read, when I was at school, that there was more fuss, and indignation, and the rest of it, about Bonaparte

having a Duke of something privately shot in a ditch at midnight, at Vincennes, than the hundreds of thousands he had killed by skilful generalship. The fact is curious, and not exactly understandable, but certain as death and quarter-day. Yes, you may depend upon it, signorini, that the poisoned Marquis, poisoned in his bed—smothered more likely at dead of night—sits heavy on the soul of the bandit captain, as the ghosts in the play do on crook-back'd Richard's. That's why he goes out, and tries to forget himself. I'll tell you a quite recent case in point,' continued my police friend and philosopher. 'A man was suspected of murder, and it being thought, after a while, from certain circumstances, that he had betaken himself to Jersey—one of the Channel Islands, you know—I was put upon his track. Arrived in the island, I made diligent inquiry respecting all strangers that had arrived within the previous three or four weeks on the island from England. But I could not spot my man. "The description you give," remarked one of the honorary police, after a long, profitless discussion, "applies with more or less exactness to an Englishman of the name of Archer, who has not been many weeks in the island. But he is not the man you want; the notion is absurd. Mr. Archer is a prince of good fellows: sings a capital song, delights the company, and but the other day was one of the foremost in succouring the unfortunates

who were wrecked off Noirmont Point." "O," said I, scenting the game in a minute, "a Mr. Archer—not been many weeks in the island—more or less answers the description I have given of the fugitive from justice—fond of society, gay company, zealous in acts of humanity when what he does can be noticed—spends money freely?" "Yes, I have heard so; more freely, even, than an Englishman with a well-filled purse, and out on the ramble, usually does." "Good again; I must make the acquaintance of Mr. Archer at once. Where shall I find him?" The required information was readily afforded, and by next day I was steaming out of St. Helier's harbour with Archer, *alias* ———, afterwards duly hanged, in custody. This gossip of mine wearies you, signorini, I perceive; and no wonder,' added my friend, with suddenly assumed business briskness; 'the real matter to be discussed is, how you are to play your little game with the fairest chance of winning. That's about the long and short of it—is it not, signorini?'

'Precisely, my friend. That is *the one* question at issue—the only question.'

'So I understand. Well, as I am expected to take a hand in the said game, and always like to be on the winning side, I vote that we play our cards very, very cautiously.'

'Yes—yes; that, excuse me, friend Keen, is a mere platitude. It is understood.'

‘I don’t know about platitudes, signorini ; but you must be uncommon kindly with the famous captain of banditti. Intimate, loving friends you must be, more than brothers to each other, like David and Jonathan.’

Really I began to think that the brandy-and-water—execrable brandy, by the bye, like all I have tasted in England ; perhaps I have been unfortunate in that respect—such as it was, had obscured my inspector friend’s clear, vulpine intellect. Not at all. *He* saw his way through a maze which merely puzzled and perplexed me. It required to be dealt with in a blunt downright fashion, which did not at the first commend itself to the subtle Italian mind.

‘Gasparo, you have told me, gambles ; but I required not that information ; every foreign bird of passage that alights in Leicester-square, so far as my experience extends, is a gambler, and little else. Well, you must play with Gasparo—and funds, I understand, will not, in reasonable measure, be wanting. You must lose with him considerable sums.’

‘Yes, yes, I understand that. It is necessary that I become the close friend, the seeming dupe, of Antonio Gasparo. Well, and then ?’

‘You are a trusted agent, are you not ? in what sense we know, but before the world you are the commercial agent of the two great firms you have mentioned.’

‘Yes, trusted within the well-defined range marked out by superior authority.’

‘Agreed. Well, you must rob those firms largely, too.’

‘How!’ I exclaimed; ‘what is that? Rob the firms! am I awake, and speaking with an inspector of police?’

‘You *are* awake, signorini, or those two black eyes would not blaze as if they meant to put mine out. As to inspector of police, I *am* that, and I have been told, A 1. You don’t understand what that means, of course not, though, for a foreigner, you do speak English uncommonly well. A 1 is a nautical term, means first-class. I was saying you must rob the two eminent firms! Of course you must; I can see no likelier mode of hooking this bandit pike, can’t indeed.’

The reader will understand that I am now writing out the notes of this and other conversations, taken roughly at the time, assisted in doing so, I hardly need say, by memory, and mine is a faithful one.

‘If Inspector Keen would but make himself intelligible, I should be obliged. My brain seems to be getting into a whirl.’

‘I’ll try, signomini. There is, I understand, a good deal hanging to this case, I mean property. When marquises and marchionesses, and counts and countesses figure in the play, the treasury must be worth grabbing. Very well, you can

make it all right with the principals of the firms—the understrappers, mind, must be kept in the dark; that's a vital point, that is. Very well, I say agsin, you lose money to our friend the bandit. Good! You make him a confidant, being driven to distraction for fear of its being discovered that you have robbed the eminent firms already of large sums, and might, for that matter, keep on robbing them till the end of the chapter; that is, of the Exhibition. Even this last twenty-pound note you lost at *écarté* to your dear friend Balsamo belonged to one of the eminent firms. Now, signorini, there is nothing which so takes with a felon, who thinks no one knows him but himself, as finding he has to do with an acknowledged felon; a fellow that he could at any moment lay by the heels. He is playing, then, as he thinks, upon velvet. Very well, Gasparo will take you, depend upon it, believing he has you under his thumb, into his entire confidence, make you his tool—he most probably wants a good many, and keen-edged ones. Being short of money—he must have, I judge, plenty of ways for getting rid of his cash—you will be encouraged to keep on robbing the eminent firms. Bless you, before a fortnight has passed, you will be sworn brothers, Jonathans and Davids. That is, signorini, if you play the game out steady, quiet, patiently. Not else, O no!

I soon mastered my clever mentor's plan of

operation, and determined upon going into the minutiae of the matter with him, to adopt and persevere with it. He himself and two selected officers would, meanwhile, keep a sharp look-out from their own point of view.

As both Italian and English theatre bills sometimes tell us, though playwrights sometimes reckon by longer periods of time, five weeks must be supposed to have passed since my interview—related, perhaps, at too great length—with Inspector Keen. During those five weeks I have angled with all my skill for Pietro Balsamo, alias Magnani, Gasparo, &c., but he has not once risen to the different baits offered. True, he had regarded several of them wistfully. I did not blindly adhere to my friend the inspector's programme, but, though half inclined, irresolute, Gasparo did not bite, still kept me at arm's length, though in the most pleasant manner. And all the while I was convinced that the miscreant felt that the soil beneath his feet was becoming hotter and hotter, and that at any moment the volcano upon which he was standing might explode. At last he gave way, and admitted me into full partnership, finally believing that he should find in me a clever, willing, much-needed accomplice, and certainly a slave.

'My friend,' said he to me one day in a jubilant tone—we had been playing since about ten at

écarté, and it was, I think, past four, *habitués* were crowding in from the Exhibition and other places of resort to the *table d'hôte* served about that hour at the Sablonière—‘my friend,’ said Gasparo, ‘you are terribly cast down. I am not surprised. I overheard yesterday the angry colloquy you had with the chief clerk of the Italian firm. Indeed, my friend, you are in a sore strait, liable at any moment to make a terrible fiasco.’

I must explain that this interview with the clerk was a little bit of carefully arranged finesse on my part. In sooth, they were becoming so furiously impatient at Florence and Turin, that it was absolutely necessary to play all my trump cards, or what looked like trump cards, if I meant to win. The clerk’s angry remonstrances were, it must be understood, genuine. He was one of the wires I was pulling. Whilst Gasparo spoke, my bowed head was covered with my outstretched palms resting upon the table at which we sat. Gasparo could hear my broken sobs, though he could not see my dancing eyes.

‘The bandit captain proceeded.

‘Yes, my good friend, you stand, I perceive, upon the brink of a precipice, and a breath may topple you into the black gulf of perdition. The situation is frightful, but means of safety are at hand. You have still, as I understand, funds at your disposal?’

‘Funds! funds! Yes, bills, acceptances, which can only be made negotiable by forgery! Do you propose that I should forge yet a stronger chain to bind me in slavery to the devil?’

‘As to Fra Diavolo,’ laughed Gasparo, ‘we need not talk of him just now. You know they say in this country he is not half so black as he is painted. But now, to be done with persiflage, blague, and such toys, let us talk seriously, for you are in an infernal position. You will be detected, seized, and in the end sentenced to a penalty *afflictive et infamante*, as the Code Napoléon runs, whether in this country or in Italy will matter little to yourself. Now, that being the case, strictly stated, it would be a charming reverse of the picture if, when the crash of the discovery—which cannot be long delayed—comes, you find yourself, your amiable wife, whom I much admire and respect, and your pretty child—upon my word, that boy will make a bright fellow—independent of the world, in possession of a handsome competence, quite out of the reach of Milan or French firms—say, in Arcadia, I believe there is such a place in the New World—poor Bacco, friend, that would present a famous tableau, eh?’

‘Yes, yes; but this unmeaning, purposeless talk tires, wearies, I may say disgusts me! Where, how am I, a broken, hunted felon—at least, I soon may be a hunted felon—how am I to

reach and better myself in the Arcadian paradise you prate of? Bah! All that is nonsense.'

'It is the most serious sense, my friend, but the paradise must be earned. You cannot else expect to be extricated from the really bottomless pit in which you are already more than half-way immersed.'

'Earned—earned! *corpo di Bacco*, I shall be only too glad to know how.'

'That is my secret, with the safe keeping of which you would never have been intrusted, but that you are already more completely in my power than I can ever be in yours. Your position, my mercantile friend, is well, distinctly defined; mine is shadowy, enveloped in clouds—clouds, it is true, in which there may be thunderbolts, but your hand or brain will not be the conducting-rod to launch them at my head. I have excellent security against that.'

Pietro Balsamo paused, flashed his eyes upon me with sudden scrutiny, and said,

'Maledetto! it is very strange, but I cannot help at times fancying I have met you somewhere, years bygone. It is always when the expression of your face seems to put on a soldierlike earnestness. Have you served?'

'Not I; I drew a lucky number in the conscription ballot. The genii who preside at the electoral urn, aware that I had no vocation for the military profession, favoured me. As to Signor Balsamo,

I feel quite sure that if he has seen me, I have never had the honour of his acquaintance till my arrival in the Britannic capital.'

'I am mistaken, then. But let us pass from the region of fancy to that of fact, hard fact. I am in need of two essentials: first, a crafty, clever agent, an Italian he must be, and devoted to my interests, for the sake of his own; secondly, I want money; money for immediate purposes, and a considerable sum, to be repaid at least tenfold! Now you, my friend, can furnish me both with the crafty, clever agent—or I misread your face—and the required sum or sunts of money.'

'The devil I can! You seem to be an adept in mysteries, like your ancestor, Giuseppe Balsamo.'

'Never mind about Giuseppe Balsamo just now. I am going to unmask myself; not entirely, I shall contrive to wear a sufficient disguise to protect myself from being too exactly identified by you, signor. It is a wise saying of ours, as you well know, that one should live with a friend as if he might one day be an enemy; with an enemy, as if in the whirligig of events he may figure as a friend. That is my Evangel, a chapter of it, at least. Now, then, to council, close council. You are not yet blown in the public ear. The good name of the well-known agent of the highly respectable Italian and French firms is, as yet, undimmed by the breath of suspicion. Very well,

you can draw upon those highly respectable firms for sums reaching to fifty thousand francs at least, which is about the amount I shall require.'

'Fifty thousand francs! Two thousand pounds in English money! Santa Maria! but that is opening your mouth wide, Signor Balsamo.'

'It is nothing, a bagatelle. I shall repay you, I said, tenfold, twentyfold. It is a complicated business,' continued the brigand, in hesitating accents, 'a very complicated business; a web of confusion which will task a subtle brain to unravel. I have played, with but one playmate to help me, a bold, and which, if I had not been desperately circumstanced, you might justly call a desperate game. It has become, too, an involved, dislocated game; I had no time to methodise the original plan. But this is vain tattle. I carried off, with the help of some of my old comrades, a noble from Florence—'

'A noble lady from Florence!' exclaimed I, 'like a fool, and but that I bit my tongue almost through, that babble tongue would have added, "the Marchesa Spezzia!"'

'Yes,' slowly and coldly rejoined the partly unmasked brigand; 'yes, a noble lady of Florence. Have *you* happened to hear that a noble lady suddenly disappeared from Florence not many months ago?'

'Not I. You surprise me by the avowal of so audacious an enterprise as the forcible abduction

of a noble lady. You must be a man of nerve, of courage, Signor Balsamo.'

'And persevering, vengeful as fearless,' returned Magnani; the dark scowl which had gathered upon his brow deepening in ferocity, and his eyes flashing daggers, as it were, in my face. 'He who should but dream of betraying me might count his remaining days upon less than his ten fingers! Enough of this; we know each other quite sufficiently: I shall require you to see and open negotiations with the noble lady. I did save others involved in the audacious abduction, as you term it. You will have to assume the character of an agent of the Florentine relatives. After many disappointments, you have at length succeeded in tracing her. That done, there must be no time lost. You have arranged the plan of escape. A vessel will be in waiting at such an hour of the night, and, once embarked, presto, the noble lady will find herself in Genoa. In reality, you understand,' added the bandit, 'the noble lady will never see Genoa. That is understood. Ha! you start at shadows, my friend. There is no intention of taking the noble lady's life. The vessel in which you will induce her to embark will sail for America—South America—a friend of mine, not you, will accompany her. The remainder of the programme will be worked out by *him*, and you will receive the recompense agreed upon.'

‘Where is the noble lady? In what country, I mean?’

‘Where is the noble lady? In what country, you mean?’ slowly echoed Magnani, his baleful gaze riveted upon my face. ‘A foolish question; at this stage of the affair, I mean. You will know in excellent time. But first the money. The two thousand pounds, the seed-corn of the golden harvest, which, if you are faithful, is as surely yours as, if you are not, or if a suspicion arises in my mind that you are not, an English model-prison—charming place, constructed upon scientific principles—or a more merciful *bloody* grave will be your portion—’

‘Signor Balsamo,’ I exclaimed, assuming an injured air, and blending with it as well as I could a defiant devil-may-care expression,—‘Signor Balsamo, your suspicions insult me. Your suspicions I—I fling back—retort.’

‘That, commercial game-cock,’ sneered the scoundrel, ‘is a croak to suit a craven. Again, I say, have done with this. When am I to have the fifty thousand francs? That is the pressing question of questions.’

‘Signor Balsamo, supposing I consent, dazzled by a glittering prize, to betray the confidence of gentlemen who trust in me—’

‘Ho, ho!’ broke in the bandit. ‘We shall next hear the devil preach the Gospel to sinners!’ The villain laughed as a fiend might, in whose

fiery grasp a condemned soul is vainly struggling. 'Now then,' he laughed on, 'supposing you consent—as if you had a choice of doing so or not!—but *supposing* you consent, when shall I obtain the money?'

I paused—reflecting. My friend Inspector Keen's exposition of the English law as regarded bills drawn by a confidential agent upon his principals had not been so clear as I could have wished. How was the legal web to be so contrived that it would securely mesh so fierce, cunning, and unscrupulous a fly as Pietro Balsamo? It was essential to gain time that I might again consult my coadjutor.

'Signor Balsamo, I am in the toils. You have acquired a power over me which I cannot resist; and you are resolved, I perceive, to make an unscrupulous use of that power. You cannot, however, wish to run the risk of defeating yourself, simply because you cannot fail, however the affair may destroy me.'

'You are quite right, my friend. I would *not*, for the mere pleasure of destroying you—and I am not so sure it would be a pleasure—defeat myself; no, no, per Bacco. I would not fire my neighbour's house if there were but a thin partition between his and mine, much as I might hate him.'

'I believe you; at least, I must believe you. I can certainly place in your hands drafts which

Coutts's bank will, as they have always done hitherto, discount, if it appear to be a *bonâ-fide* transaction. I mean, if the person presenting the draft be the person to whom it has been indorsed, and of course bearing his indorsement. I myself being known at the bank personally could not, as drawer, present the draft for payment.'

I was getting less foggy in mind as to how the decoy-drafts were to be concocted.

Signor Balsamo muscd for a few minutes.

'I understand the difficulty,' he said. 'Well, it must be surmounted. Have you the drafts about you?'

'No; to-morrow at about this time I can hand them to you.'

I, in my turn, paused, looking anxious, perturbed.

'Signor Balsamo,' I presently resumed,—
'Signor Balsamo, there must be some degree of reciprocity. I have foolishly permitted myself to be driven into a corner. Still, I must make, for the sake of my wife and son, if not of myself, some effort for life—for freedom—fortune!'

'That is reasonable. Speak out!'

'Thank you for that gracious permission, thought I; but I would see you carbondoeed first.'

'All my mind upon this transaction is that you give me a memorandum assuring me four hundred thousand francs within a given date, the stated consideration for which being drafts to the

amount of fifty thousand francs, and services to be hereafter performed by me.'

'I consent, but shall not sign till I have the fifty thousand francs safe in my pocket.'

'I, in my turn, consent to that condition. We will talk further to-morrow.'

We agreed to meet at ten the next morning in the same place, I to be provided with the indispensable drafts.

I immediately sought my inspector friend. We had a long talk together, and finally settled our plan of procedure. He entirely agreed with me that Magnani, *alias* Balsamo, would, the two thousand pounds once obtained, dispense with my services in respect of the noble lady carried off from Florence. I had detected that determination in the fellow's scowling front. It was probably an after-thought.

Signor Balsamo and a new friend of his—new to me—who called himself Signor Ferrari—a bold-faced rascal—met me at about four in the afternoon, by appointment, in a private room at the White Horse, Regent-street. At ten I had met Balsamo, and handed him the required drafts. He was now in obstreperous spirits, as was his friend Ferrari. They had been carousing; but it was golden wine which glared in their cheeks, flamed in their eyes. The two thousand odd pounds, in Bank of England notes and sovereigns,

of that fact the confederate ruffians were blissfully conscious; but of another portentous fact they were as blissfully unconscious—namely, that from the moment Signor Pietro Balsamo, with trembling fingers, gathered up the money on Coutts's counter, they themselves had been in safe custody and not for one moment lost sight of till they entered 'the White Horse':

'Wine—wine!' hilariously exclaimed Pietro Balsamo, after the usual compliments. 'Wine, wine! Champagne! and of the finest vintage the house can afford. My good, excellent friend, your signature is a talisman; you yourself, El Dorado! Ha, ha! it is excellent. I can dance now for the first time since—ah, never mind when. Ha, ha! the celebrated Pas de Fripons! Ha, ha! the *pleasant chink* of gold!'

I enjoyed the reckless bandit's rollicking foolery, knowing well how soon the strings which made that music would be let down, and with a run, as I, when a sailor, used to say. It would be then *my* turn to cry 'Ha, ha!'

The excellent wine passed briskly about. How triumphantly ferocious the bandit looked! Ferrari was a mitigated copy of his ruffian chief.

'And now, Signor Balsamo,' said I, after some quarter of an hour's talk over the wine, 'let us speak seriously of serious business. Where am I to meet with the noble Italian lady, whom I am to persuade to embark, as she will suppose, for

Genoa, really for South America; somewhere, perhaps, in the Terra del Fuego?’

Pietro Balsamo was not so carried, elated by champagne or cash as not to be startled by the tone in which I spoke, more so than by the words. He regarded me keenly; a glass of wine which he was lifting to his lips was replaced untasted on the table. A few moments’ thought reassured him. Was not *my* head in the lion’s mouth? What could there be to fear from *me*? Nothing, less than nothing, if that were possible.

‘Ah, my good friend, we often speak in Greek. I have before made that remark, I think,’ said Balsamo with recovered effrontery; ‘I am afraid there will be no occasion for your valuable services. My friend here, Ferrari, will manage the matter very well. I need hardly say that I romanced a good deal when speaking to you. It is a weakness with me to do so. There is no “noble lady” in the case; all that was brag. Still, my friend, your reward is sure. Let us drink.’

‘These cigars are positively detestable,’ I remarked, rising and stepping towards the bell-pull; ‘I must see if the White Horse, which I have been told by English friends is celebrated for its primo Havannahs, cannot supply us with a few.’

I rang the bell in a peculiar manner, not observedly peculiar, especially by men who had imbibed two bottles of champagne each. They drank fast, feverishly.

A few anxious moments passed. I don't know why I should have been anxious, the quarry was safely driven to earth. The waiter having entered, asked what was wanted, and told cigars No. 7 were required. I said quietly as I was able,

‘Signor Balsamo, do I not remember your saying that at the tavern of Santa Rosalia, in Petra, at the southern foot of the Apennines, you met with a certain Turinese—a police-officer—who, for a small wager, sent a bullet from a Colt revolver through the head of a small stuffed bird? Do you think you would know that officer?’

‘Maledetto! What is this?’ exclaimed Magnani, starting to his feet, and glaring at me like a panther at bay.

‘Do you recognise him?’ I added. ‘You should do so, for he is before you. I am the man whose skill with the revolver you so admired upon that occasion.’

‘Ten thousand curses!’ What is this?’ screamed Balsamo. ‘You—you—a commission agent, who has robbed your employer of hundreds—you—you—ha!’ he stamps his feet. ‘I am lost. Feu d’enfer! I have dreamed of this!’

‘We shall require you, Signor Balsamo,’ said that blandest of inspectors, Keen, ‘we shall require you at once to place in our hands the Bank of England notes and sovereigns you received about an hour since at Coutts’s bank.’

Balsamo handed over the notes.

‘Very good ; it is always most gentlemanly to submit to the inevitable with a good grace ; it is philosophical to do so.’

‘You have the money,’ growled Magnani, with a sneer, ‘you have the money, and we may, I suppose, be gone. Come, Ferrari. As to you,’ added the ruffian, all the tiger in his nature roused, and looking as if he could spring upon and rend me—‘as for you—but words are breath, mere threats will not strike you so sharp as a—’

‘A stiletto, signor, the national weapon, eh ? Well, it is a conclusive one. No, no, signor, you and your friend cannot be allowed to take such speedy leave. I have three blue-coated gents, with white metal buttons, who will require the password from me first. They will remain without, watchful, you know, so let us talk this curious affair over quietly. With your permission, signor,’ added the debonair detective, filling himself a bumper of champagne, ‘with your permission, and to your excellency’s health. Ah, capital wine ; vintage, I should say, of ’37—the comet year. It is remarkable, is it not, that in comet years the vintage, especially in the south of France—’

‘Curse the comet-years !’ fiercely interrupted Balsamo. ‘Are we prisoners ? Answer me that, and do your worst. Malediction ! If I could but have only two minutes’ private conversation with this commission agent—this wolf in sheep’s clothing, I would forgive him—you—all—everybody !’

‘We know all about the sudden death of the Marchese Spezzia,’ said the inspector quietly. ‘The bride of midnight, it was said, called him, which bride of midnight, there is a strong suspicion, was a certain Lucrezia, your wife, Signor Balsamo, you with the aliases. Now keep cool; don’t forget the three individuals in blue coats and white metal buttons just without, and one hundred, at least, of the same “no mistake” fraternity within call. Therefore keep cool. We also know that the Marchese, her nephew, and your daughter, Lucrezia, have also suddenly disappeared from Florence, and a hot hunt has been set on foot to discover where they are, somewhere in France it is supposed.’

‘All this is nothing to me,’ growled the bandit, who was fast recovering his constitutional audacity; ‘if I were really guilty of the crimes you hint at, there is no treaty of extradition between England and the Grand Dukedom of Tuscany, nor with the State of Piedmont.’

‘True, signor, quite true, and this gives my friend, the excellent pistol-shot, and no considerable trouble. We were quite sure that such an astute gentleman as you are—no flattery, I assure you—would be well up in international law, as regards extradition treaties, so that in order to secure you, my noble signor, it was necessary to weave a chain of peculiar construction. Upon my word, signor, remembering as I do, not, perhaps,

quite clearly, but remembering, nevertheless, what they tell us in school-books of the subtle Italian intellect—one Michael, or Machiavelli, was, I understood, the pattern-mind of your nation—I do think you showed a strange deficiency in swallowing that cock-and-bull story of our friend here having robbed his employers, and, upon the strength of that silly belief, uttering fictitious drafts, knowing them to be such—I do indeed. Now, you see, we have you fast. Penal servitude for life, signor—now you see, or you ought to see, there's an opening for a transaction. It is possible, signor, that if it were disclosed where we could find the noble Marchesa and other persons, and find them alive, this matter of the drafts cashed at Coutts's bank might not be pressed. I say *might* not.'

Balsamo champed the bit, and raged in fetters, which were not, however, to be broken! At last the transaction was completed as far as it could be done by words. Balsamo agreed to afford every facility for the discovery of the Marchesa and her nephew, who were, it seemed, confined in separate private establishments for the reception of persons certified by a medical gentleman to be afflicted with 'monomania,' or other mental disease or weakness.

'Now that you have got the money, and as good as got the Marchesa,' savagely smiled Magnani, 'you don't want me, I suppose?'

I promptly objected to his liberation till, at all events, the truth of the information he had given had been ascertained, and the hoped-for results realised. 'The inspector concurred; but there was a difficulty. He made a sign to me, and we left the room, our places being *pro tem.* supplied by the men without in blue coats and plated buttons.

'Here is the difficulty,' said Keen. 'The charge against the scoundrel with respect to obtaining the money at Coutts's upon your drafts would not, I am informed, hold water for a moment. We must try another dodge. Make him believe that a sort of police-writ of *ne exeat regno* will be issued against him; that is to say, persuade him he will not be lost sight of till we find he has acted on the square as regards this first little transaction; that a detective officer, unrecognisable by him, because in plain clothes, will be constantly at his heels on the watch, and that any attempt to bolt would be followed by his immediate lodgment in jail.'

I agreed that under the circumstances nothing better could be done. Balsamo willingly acquiesced in the proposed arrangement.

I need not take the reader with me to France. Enough that the Marchesa and her nephew were restored to freedom; that the two Lucrezias, mother and daughter, slips of Satan both of them, joined the husband and father at the Sablonière. I informed him that, as far as the English law was

concerned, he was at liberty to go whither he pleased.

‘Permit me to express my appreciation—my ~~re~~ genuine appreciation—of the generous forbearance, all things considered, with which you have acted to me. My wife and daughter reciprocate my sentiments. It may be that some day I may find an opportunity, in the better life which I propose to lead—we start in a few days for South America, *not* Terra del Fuego—of repaying some part of the obligation.’

If I had done with the bandit, however, he had not with me. On the fifth or sixth day after I had left Magnani at the Sablonière, towards evening, I, upon my returning home more tired than usual, was informed by my wife that a young man, who gave the name of Beza, and said he came from the Italian firm at the Crystal Palace, had brought a small parcel for me, and which I alone was to open.

‘Beza, Beza!’ I exclaimed ~~and~~ why, I parted with him not an hour ago, and he made no mention of a parcel.’

‘That is singular, to say the least,’ said my wife; ‘it must be about an hour since that the person calling himself Beza was here. There is the parcel on the table in the window-recess. The young man handed it me gently,’ added Marietta, ‘telling me it contained precious and extremely fragile articles.’

‘Ah, the so-called Beza handled the packet very gently, did he! To be sure he would. Let me read the address: “Very important, and to be opened by myself only.” The sender is no doubt desirous that I should have the full benefit of his present. Ah, Magnani, thou art a subtle devil; but there are brains in Italian skulls penetrative as thine own!’

Reflecting for a few moments, I rang the bell, and desired to see the landlord, at the same time requesting my wife to go out to a short distance, taking our child with her, to execute a trifling commission. She complied with my request, and so did the worthy landlord.

I briefly explained the situation to him, and he invited me to examine his coal-cellar. I did so. There could, I thought, be no danger of exploding so tiny a parcel therein—if it would explode. I could stand at a sufficient distance off, whilst the capaciousness of the cellar, and the seeming solidity of the walls, precluded the idea of danger to the premises. I returned for the little packet, took it in my hand with the utmost tenderness, reached the entrance to the cellar, the landlord following pretty close behind. I was about to upraise my arm to fling the packet to the far end of the coal-cellar, when, making a quick step forward, I stumbled over an inequality on the floor, fell, the parcel struck the ground, and the explosion took place. Luckily for me, I was prone

upon the cellar floor ; the force of the fulminating powder expended itself in an upward and lateral direction, but not so laterally as to affect my recumbent position. The landlord was much less fortunate. He was flung down with much violence ; and, though he sustained no permanent injury, it was several weeks before he was quite himself again.

The next day's papers contained a paragraph which set forth that by some accident a parcel of detonating powder had exploded at a house in Cranbourne-street, Leicester-square, causing the death of an Italian gentleman lodging there ; at least his case was pronounced hopeless, and that it was a most fortunate circumstance the Italian gentleman's wife and child were absent at the time of the explosion.

The ship in which Signor Balsamo and the two Lucrezias were to sail would leave the following day. I went on board the same afternoon—I mean the afternoon of the day when the paragraph appeared, and before the evening papers could correct the mistake. He and his family were pretty sure to be on board. I was not mistaken. He and the ladies, one of the mates told me, were in the state cabin ; had dined there, and were, he supposed, partaking of dessert.

‘I knew that Italian scoundrel well, as I have before said’—Balsamo was addressing his broken English to the captain of the ship—‘I knew, I repeat, the Italian scoundrel well. I believe he

and at least three murders on his head. It is a case of suicide, be sure of it. He is with his friends now, and I rejoice at it. I am rejoiced; it is glorious; just retribution. Ha, ha! L'Amazônia, inignonne, our voyage to the New World begins under favouring omens.'

'Signor Balsamo, otherwise Antonio Magnani, captain of Italian bandits, your clever contrivance missed its aim, you perceive. Captain, this fellow, petrified by the appearance of the man—the last man he believed he had succeeded in murdering—is capable of any villany. Look well to yourself. I predict that he will prove an unlucky passenger—another Jonas.'

Strange to say that this haphazard prediction was, to a certain extent, realised by the event. A few days after passing the line, the Medusa, which had been exposed to terrible stress of weather, was becalmed for several days. The men amused themselves in various ways; amongst others, in fishing with pieces of pork for sharks that kept swimming about the ship. How precisely the accident progressed I did not clearly understand, but Magnani's logs, one or both of them, became entangled in the fishing-line, and he was jerked or pulled overboard, and was instantly devoured by the voracious sea-devils.



